

# THE INVESTIGATORS in

## THE MYSTERY OF THE VOICES FROM NOWHERE





in

**THE MYSTERY  
OF THE  
VOICES FROM NOWHERE**

“My sister wants me dead!” The old lady sitting next to Jupiter in the waiting room is on the verge of a nervous breakdown. He smells a new case for The Three Investigators and offers his help. But what he learns gives him goosebumps. The voices that terrify Miss Holligan apparently come from the afterlife, for her allegedly abusive sister died three months ago. Jupiter, Pete and Bob must hurry to solve the case. Miss Holligan has a bad heart condition, and every new abuse can put her life in jeopardy. But who is really behind the mysterious voices?

The Three Investigators  
in  
The Mystery of the Voices from Nowhere

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## 1. Voices from Nowhere

The scream sounded like pure fear. The toilet door was swung open and an elderly lady with a pale face staggered out into the clinic's waiting room, gasping for air. There she collided with Jupiter, who just managed to catch her when she lost her balance. Even before Jupiter could figure out how to get the situation under control, the receptionist behind the counter hurried over to help.

"Come on, Miss Holligan! Just take it easy. It's all right." The words from the receptionist sounded emotionless, as if she didn't even care why the old lady was so upset. It just seemed important to her that there was no unrest in the waiting area in front of her counter. There the patients sat tightly packed on uncomfortable chairs and looked on curiously and silently, but without taking part in the event.

"It... it... it really was her!" The old lady trembled all over. Sweat had formed on her forehead.

The receptionist, Mrs Petersen, led her to a chair. Miss Holligan, however, refused to sit down.

"The voice... I heard it very clearly," she stammered. "My sister... She spoke to me."

"Where? In the toilet?" The question sounded so ironic that some of the patients in the waiting room began to grin or stare bashfully at the floor.

Jupiter tried to capture every detail exchanged between the receptionist and Miss Holligan.

"Don't treat me like I have a screw loose or something! I know exactly what I heard! My sister..." Before she could finish the sentence, however, she had to swallow hard once more. "She has... she has spoken to me." Miss Holligan's lips began to tremble uncontrollably and her eyes looked to the waiting patients for help, most of whom now, however, embarrassingly hid their faces with a magazine or newspaper.

Miss Holligan's eyes were filled with tears. Jupiter had a cold shiver running down his back. He could empathize with how someone must feel if nobody takes them seriously.

Mrs Petersen didn't know how to help her. She hurried behind the counter and pressed a button on the intercom. Nothing happened for a few seconds. Then a buzz sounded from the speaker. "Yes, please?" The female voice from the intercom sounded cold and at the same time very busy.

"Sorry to bother you, Dr Franklin, but I think Miss Holligan needs your help." Meanwhile, a patient queue had formed in front of her counter, waiting impatiently for their prescriptions and new appointments, while the voice from the loudspeaker replied repulsively: "I am in the middle of preparing for a hypnosis, Mrs Petersen. I'll send someone out to you. Give Miss Holligan an appointment for this afternoon and please don't disturb me at my session now." This was followed by another buzz in the speaker. The connection to Dr Franklin ended.

At the same moment, the door to one of the consulting rooms opened and a woman in a white coat walked purposefully towards Miss Holligan, who had now sunk exhausted on a chair. The name tag identified her as Dr Miller.

“Miss Holligan, what’s bothering you?” Calm and relaxed, the doctor took the patient’s hand and pulled a paper handkerchief out of her coat. Miss Holligan gratefully unfolded the handkerchief, rubbed her eyes dry and then blew her nose with a loud snort.

Then she pointed with trembling fingers to the toilet door. “I didn’t imagine it, even if Mrs Petersen disagrees. I actually heard her. She spoke to me. And I understood her as clearly as I hear you now.”

“Wait, wait...” Dr Miller seemed irritated and tried to make eye contact with Mrs Petersen. But now she devoted herself completely to the patients in front of the counter and didn’t look up.

“You don’t believe me. Nobody believes me!” Miss Holligan’s eyes were filled with tears again.

Jupiter felt that she was going to have another anxious moment so he decided to intervene. “Shouldn’t we check the toilet?” After he had asked this question, there was embarrassing silence for a few seconds. Dr Miller was the first to respond.

Her already thin lips narrowed to an almost straight line before she sharply approached Jupiter. “I don’t think you need to get involved in this, young man. Miss Holligan is undergoing medical treatment with us. She should rest a few minutes and will leave everything else to Dr Franklin.”

“But the young man is right!” said a voice from behind.

Jupiter turned around in alarm and looked into the determined face of an older gentleman. Under his right arm was a briefcase where his bony fingers grasped with a firm grip. “Why don’t you just address the problem directly and, uh, check the toilet?”

Apparently, Dr Miller did not like the fact that an outsider questioned her professional competence. “Mr Brian,” she began, “you did have an appointment with Dr Hendrixen, didn’t you? We all know that he’s in charge of general medicine. You are his patient, as is this young man here.” With her long index finger, she pointed to Jupiter. “This patient, however,” her finger changed its position by 90 degrees and now pointed unmistakably in Miss Holligan’s direction, “is exclusively under Dr Franklin’s care. So let’s leave the decision to the specialist.”

Jupiter glanced at the door of Dr Franklin’s consulting room and looked at the sign that said ‘psychotherapist’.

Dr Miller pushed her gold rimmed glasses onto the tip of her nose and threw an angry look at the gentleman with the briefcase. There was a depressing silence among the patients.

Suddenly a young woman rose from her chair, pushed her pram aside and walked straight towards Dr Miller. “I don’t know what happened a few minutes ago behind this toilet door, but at least I’m much more interested in that than to hear from you who is being treated by whom in this clinic!”

Dr Miller opened her mouth and was about to put the young woman in her place. But that didn’t happen, because the woman herself took the initiative and headed straight for the toilet door with the inscription ‘Ladies’.

Miss Holligan, with an anxious expression, also rose from her chair and went up to the young mother, who was already holding the handle of the toilet door.

“Don’t go alone!” Her voice sounded fragile. “I’m begging you!”

With a smile, the woman said to Miss Holligan while pointing to her pram. “Watch my child over there. If I should actually meet your sister behind this door, then I am curious to hear how she has spent the last half hour passing her time. That’s how long I’ve been sitting here in the waiting room. And I noticed that no one but you had gone to the toilet since.”



Jupiter looked at Dr Miller, whose mouth was still open, and pushed his obese body past the speechless doctor. “Wait a minute. I’m going with you!”

But the doctor didn’t admit defeat that easily. Her health shoes clattered energetically over the tiles and gave her bossy character the appropriate acoustic background. She caught Jupiter by the sweater and pulled him back. “You’ve no business in the ladies’ toilet! Just to satisfy all of you, I’ll go in with her.”

As if this had been an invitation, two more women rose from their chairs and curiously approached the toilet that had received the most attention in the last five minutes. However, they stopped in front of it and peered inside.

## 2. Damp Hands

Inside the toilet, everything was quiet. Jupiter's ears were pointed like a parabolic bowl. He only heard the rattling of Dr Miller's shoes. He would have loved to inspect the toilet himself, had he not been stopped.

Then silence reigned for a few seconds until Jupiter suddenly heard Dr Miller speak. She said quietly, but Jupiter's sharp ears could hear every word. "I can sympathize with your feelings very well, young woman. One should, of course, pursue such a matter in any case. But this patient's situation is a little different."

"What's that supposed to mean? Is the patient suffering from paranoia?"

The doctor cleared her throat. "It's not that easy to explain. As you can see, there is nothing here that would be unusual for a ladies' toilet. And certainly there is nothing that would suggest a strange voice. That we can be assured. And Dr Franklin is a recognized expert, almost a luminary in her field. I'm sure she'll be able to help the patient. So far she's made a lot of progress. Believe me."

"But there's no question of strange voices here." The young mother did not seem to be satisfied with Dr Miller's explanation so quickly. "Didn't the lady mention it was her sister's voice?"

"Young woman, whoever is being treated here, for whatever reason, by whomever, I am unfortunately not allowed to disclose. Not even to you," Dr Miller explained. "I'm sorry, but those were her words. If I wanted to go into Miss Holligan's problems in more detail, I would be violating the trust of our patients. I hope you understand. As you have also noted, there are no signs that an unauthorized person who frightens the patients might be hidden here. That would be ridiculous. There's nothing here! I can only recommend that you don't believe this lady too much. She's mentally ill. That's all I'm going to say."

Jupiter gave Miss Holligan a quick look and hoped that the old lady who had joined him in the meantime had not heard that snide remark.

"And?" Sceptical and expectant at the same time, Miss Holligan looked at the young mother's face when she stepped in front of Jupiter. However, the woman was not capable of more than a shrug of the shoulder.

Dr Miller went to the receptionist, who was still busy with the patient queue behind her counter, and said: "Mrs Petersen, give Miss Holligan an appointment this afternoon with Dr Franklin. Sector seven blue." With these words, the doctor disappeared into one of the many rooms in the clinic.

Miss Holligan silently received the note that the receptionist handed to her over the counter. With slow movements, she put it in her handbag and made her way through the hallway towards the exit. There were some chairs at the side, and with a sigh, she sat down and hid her face in her hands.

Jupiter couldn't take his eyes off the old lady. She was about seventy years old. She had tied her grey hair into a knot and the hands that was still wrapped around her face were wrinkled. Miss Holligan seemed far away with her thoughts.

Jupiter walked slowly towards her and sat next to her.

“How are you, ma’am?” he asked and found his question completely inappropriate, given the previous situation. So he quickly added, “Perhaps I can help you?”

Miss Holligan dropped her hands on her lap and looked at Jupiter resignedly. “It seems no one can help me. I’m probably just getting old. I have to accept that.”

Jupiter wanted to say something, but the lady waved her tired hand. “I’ve always been a realist,” she said, “and the doctor that takes care of you should be trusted. Age is a tricky thing, young man. When you’re as young as you are, you don’t worry much about things. What’s the point? Over time they creep in, the little aches and pains that make everyday life more difficult. Then your hair turns grey, walking is difficult, your eyesight becomes weaker, and gradually your teeth fall out.”

Jupiter felt a shiver. He was uncomfortably touched by the old lady’s relentless openness.

“But I’m not complaining,” she added. “Because I’m still alive.”

Jupiter had never made a secret of his curiosity. For him it was the most effective way to understand people better. But now he decided that restraint was appropriate in view of the prevailing situation. He couldn’t judge Miss Holligan. The fact that the lady was in psychotherapeutic treatment prevented him from going on the offensive with his probing questions.

Miss Holligan seemed to have guessed his thoughts.

“Why are you silent?” she asked and looked at Jupiter with clear eyes. “You don’t dare to ask me about my suffering. But you understood as well as I did what Dr Miller told that young woman about me in the toilet.”

“Yes,” he admitted frankly.

“My body is deteriorating rapidly, but my hearing is still fabulous. It’s the only thing I can count on one hundred percent. It wasn’t a hallucination,” she said. “I know exactly what I heard, even if the doctors here may disagree. They call it paranoia.” Miss Holligan’s voice slowly took on a sarcastic tone. “I can probably still be grateful that they didn’t immediately admit me to the sanatorium and pump me full of sedatives.”

“This voice, ma’am...” Jupiter grotesquely felt like a psychologist trying to track down his patient’s problem. “You mentioned earlier that your sister’s voice spoke to you in the toilet. Is that right?”

Miss Holligan nodded.

“Assuming that you ignore the fact that voices don’t just come out of nowhere for no apparent reason—why are you so upset?”

The old lady looked at Jupiter with her eyes wide open.

“I’m scared. Great fear!” Her hands started to tremble again. Then she grabbed Jupiter’s fingers and held them tightly. “My sister threatens me. She’s trying to hurt me! She torments me on the phone and destroys my house. She won’t rest until I’m buried.

“Last night I got a phone call. It was Metzla and she made it unmistakably clear to me that my end was coming soon. My sister wants me dead!”

Jupiter was glad when Miss Holligan’s damp hands released him. He stood up and smoothed his T-shirt over his stomach. “Miss Holligan,” he began, “I don’t think it’s surprising that your sister’s voice has followed you all the way to the toilet. Given the situation you are in right now, I find it understandable. I don’t know what Dr Franklin advised you to do, but I see an opportunity to quickly put an end to your sister’s abuses and bring her to justice.”

“How are you going to do that?”

“Have you been to the police?”

“Oh,” Miss Holligan waved wearily. “About a dozen times.”

“They don’t believe you, do they?” Jupiter’s eyes began to glow. “They think you’re an old, confused woman who desperately needs psychological treatment. Am I right?”

Miss Holligan swallowed. “Something like that, yeah.”

“Then may I ask you to transfer the case to us. My two partners and I, we’re a detective team. We specialize in solving mysterious incidents and secrets of all kinds. I’d consider it a privilege to help you out of this situation so you can sleep soundly again.” Jupiter put his hand in his back pocket and pulled out a business card. He handed it to the old lady, whereupon she opened her handbag and laboriously got out her glasses. The glasses were cut from thick glass, and Miss Holligan’s eyes stared out incredibly enlarged and moved alternately from left to right while reading the small card. It said:



Miss Holligan was well aware of the deterrent effect of her glasses. After she had read the text on the business card, there was nothing more urgent for her than to take the glasses off and let it disappear into her handbag.

“Take the case, boys!” She opened her handbag again and with nervously trembling fingers, she came up with a piece of paper and a ballpoint pen. “Wait... I’ll write down my address.”

She put her handbag on her lap as a desk pad and handed Jupiter a note a short time later. “And you really think you can catch my sister before she can do anything to me?”

“We cannot guarantee success, ma’am. But we promise to make an effort,” he said.

“Besides, I don’t think you’re in urgent need of psychological help. Your sister is.”

“I fully agree with you. There’s only one little catch.”

Jupiter looked up surprised, but Miss Holligan’s eyes suddenly seemed to stare through him without expression.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“My sister’s been dead for three months!”

### 3. Blind Hatred

“You think I’m crazy, don’t you?” But Miss Holligan did not wait for an answer. “I know very well that the dead are not able to phone and destroys things. And even better, I know that you shouldn’t talk to anyone about it when you’re at the mercy of such an eerie phenomenon. But could you perhaps explain to me what you would do in such a situation?”

Jupiter was lost for words. Two minutes ago, he had been passionate about taking on Miss Holligan’s case. Now he was convinced that the lady needed psychological help rather than that of The Three Investigators.

But he was curious and wanted to know more about Miss Holligan’s sister. “Miss Holligan,” he began, “I and my two detective partners, Pete and Bob, have already countered many cases of seemingly supernatural phenomena.

“Oh, yeah?” Miss Holligan seemed to have regained her composure. “If I have to go through this a few more times, I probably wouldn’t be here on earth anymore. I have a bad heart condition and the doctors have prescribed strong medication for me. And my sister’s terrifying attacks are additional burdens. If you and your two—as you have just said so nicely, uh—detective partners, have already met dozens of seemingly supernatural phenomena, then I would be very curious to know who or what you had dealt with.”

“Miss Holligan,” Jupiter replied, “you’re about to take on a role of someone who will have a hard time taking the truth from a, well, let’s say, slightly overweight boy.”

“What do you mean?”

Jupiter now had Miss Holligan’s full attention. “We’re detectives. And many of our clients ask us for help, because they are allegedly harassed or threatened by haunting phenomena—Spirits, devils, gnomes and phantoms, dragons, UFOs and so on. These encounters were always scary, mysterious and often dangerous. But all of them had one thing in common—they were of natural origin, or...” He made a theatrical pause and looked intently at Miss Holligan. “... man-made to conceal a criminal intent behind them. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, this was the case. I must admit that I would be tempted to find out whether the ‘afterlife attacks’ of your late sister were really a supernatural phenomenon. But I’m convinced that we’d disappoint you.”

“I’d love to see that disappointment.” Miss Holligan shifted nervously around her chair until she found a more comfortable sitting position. “But the whole thing, as I mentioned at the beginning, has a little catch.”

“And what would that be?” Jupiter was getting restless.

“My sister is dead! That’s the catch.”

“You already said that.” The First Investigator’s tone remained polite, although he slowly but surely felt the impulse to point out to Miss Holligan that he didn’t like this kind of conversation very much. He had made it his business to express things in a complicated way, even if they could be said with simple words just as well, but he had a tough nut to crack with this old lady, who apparently also enjoyed speaking in riddles. On the surface, he had the impression that they both talked past each other, but instinctively he knew he had not yet found the right approach to respond to her way of thinking and speaking.

"I can only repeat—my sister's dead. I closed her eyes on her deathbed myself. She had a brain tumour and I was glad that she finally didn't have to suffer anymore. Her pain was unbearable."

Jupiter was about to respond with sympathy, but Miss Holligan didn't let it happen. "Now, please, don't use phrases like 'I'm sorry' or anything like that. I would have really wished my sister a more pleasant death despite the fierce and regular arguments we had. You can believe me on that. Nevertheless, Metzla was a tyrant and she hated me."

"What reasons did she have?"

"Jealousy," she said dryly, adding, "And strong inferiority complexes."

"Jealous?" asked Jupiter. "About what?"

"About everything. Especially about me. I have to explain that Metzla was of small stature. All her life she had to 'look up' to others, including me—the younger sister."

"I can still see her in front of me today, with her grim face and the little red handbag she always carried! When our father died, the inheritance was divided among the two of us. I was given our parents' villa, while Metzla was given the family business—a textile factory. In my eyes this was fair, but my sister only looked at other people's plates and was always dissatisfied with her portion. No matter what it was."

Jupiter had trouble to stifle a grin with this pictorial explanation.

"We've lived in the same house since childhood," Miss Holligan continued. "Metzla married early, moved out and followed her husband to his ranch in Mexico. She hasn't heard from me in over forty years. She broke off the contact with our parents and me without any reason and did not even come to our mother's funeral. But when our father died years later and the will was about to be opened, she suddenly stood at the door again. But not out of sympathy."

"The timing was more than convenient for her. Shortly before that, she had lost everything in Mexico. The ranch was burned to the ground. The remains of her husband were found in the charred ruins."

Miss Holligan opened her handbag again. Jupiter expected her to pull out a photo of her sister, but the old lady just pulled out a handkerchief and blew her nose in it hard. "But I had no grudge against her. On the contrary, I let her move back into the house which then belonged to me as in the will."

"And then what?"

"Two years later, I decided to sell the house. The memories became too much for me. Without my father, the house looked so cold and empty. In the meantime my sister had bought a small condominium using the money from the textile factory. So I lived alone and suffered from depression. Then one day I took heart and placed an ad in the *Los Angeles Times* to offer the house for sale. It was not an easy decision for me to make. But much worse, when I found a buyer and the sale had already been completed, my sister went on a rage."

"How may I understand that?"

"She raved and screamed that I had destroyed our father's legacy and would perish financially. She was always thinking materialistically. She didn't have inner values." She took a deep breath. "Then came the brain tumour. Metzla had to engage nursing care and I moved into her condominium temporarily because she did not want to live with me in my new house. She was in bed most of the time. Her headaches got worse every day. She knew that she would soon die and did not allow me to be healthy, although I sacrificed myself day and night for her. Not an hour went by without her abusing me. She wet her bed, broke the valuable family dishes and insulted me in the worst way. She said: 'If it hadn't been for you,

my life would have been completely different and I wouldn't be lying here on my deathbed'. Those were her exact words."

Jupiter flinched.

"In the end, Metzla had nothing but pure hatred. I couldn't talk sense to her anymore. The disease had already progressed further. Then one night, it went too far." Miss Holligan interrupted her story because now the young mother came into the hallway and approached the exit with her pram. Without a word, her eyes focussed on her baby, she passed Jupiter and the old lady and left the clinic.

Miss Holligan waited until the door close before continuing her story. "The devil couldn't have staged it better. I was woken up from my sleep that night by Metzla's moaning pain, while a terrible thunderstorm raged outside. I hurried straight to her room. My sister was on her last legs. She was sweating and had torn her nightgown because of the heat from the fever. With a trembling hand she waved me to her bed and gasped a little. It was too soft to hear, so I got my ear closer to her mouth. And then she said it..."

Jupiter had experienced a lot of scary things in his life, but what Miss Holligan told him in broad daylight in the hallway of a clinic gave his whole body goosebumps. As if to make her story even more realistic, the old lady pulled Jupiter by his T-shirt up to her and put her mouth close to his ear.

"I hate you, Abigail. You've messed up my whole life. I'm going to die now, but I will take my revenge on you, you hear?" Miss Holligan gasped, her voice stuttered. "... I'll be back..."

The First Investigator couldn't stand this close-up demonstration any longer. He rubbed his right leg which, contrary to his attention, had fallen asleep during Miss Holligan's eerie story.

"Miss Holligan," he began, feeling the urgent need to rub away her damp breath, which still seemed to stick on his ear. However, out of courtesy, he refrained from doing so. "After your sister passed away, how long after did these attacks begin?"

"About two months after the funeral, I got the first call. I remember it very well. It was the nineteenth of June, on my birthday. I was in the kitchen peeling potatoes. The phone rang in the living room. I was sure it would be my friend Gloria from Boston. She loves chatting with me for hours. So I carried the bowl of the potatoes and the knife to the telephone, sat down on the small chair and picked up the phone."

Jupiter had the scene clearly before his eyes. He was fascinated by Miss Holligan's intense and detailed portrayal of the situation.

"At first I only heard a hiss," she continued, "but that's nothing unusual for long-distance calls from Boston. Sometimes you have to wait a few seconds until the caller responds at the other end of the line. Well, I waited and stuck the earpiece between my ear and my shoulder in order to be able to peel more potatoes. Then suddenly Metzla's eerie voice came out of the earpiece and whispered: 'I hate you and I will not rest until you have received your last rites...'"

"And it was really her voice?" Jupiter felt an inner unrest.

"There's no doubt about it." Her eyelids twitched nervously. "It was as if I was struck by lightning! I cried out loud, and in horror I accidentally cut my finger with my potato knife. And then something happened that I really cannot understand..."

Jupiter looked at Miss Holligan expectantly.

"So far, young man, one could assume that someone played a tasteless trick on me with recorded messages. But after I had cut my finger with the knife, I heard Metzla's voice,

which hissed from the phone: ‘You will bleed, Abigail! ... Bleed bitterly’. Then she laughed maliciously and the connection was broken.”

“That’s weird, though.”

“That’s not just weird. It cannot be explained. No one but me could know that I had cut my finger. And yet it seemed as if Metzla had seen it, felt it or even made it happen.”

“Mr Jones?” The voice of the receptionist sounded shrill across the hall. Jupiter looked up and saw Mrs Petersen waving him from the counter with a large folder in her hand.

“One moment, Miss Holligan. I’ll be right back.”

Jupiter rose and walked with swift steps to the counter.

“Here are the X-rays of your lungs. The referral to the lung specialist is in the envelope.” Mrs Petersen handed Jupiter a brown envelope and smiled at him.

Jupiter thanked her and turned to return to Miss Holligan. But when he walked back to the hallway, he saw that she was gone!



## 4. A Person's Soul

Distraught, Jupiter walked down the hallway, stepped out the front door and looked at the elevator's indicator light. The number made it unmistakably clear to him that the lift had already arrived on the ground floor. Miss Holligan had disappeared without saying goodbye. However, he rejected his impulsive idea of running down the stairwell in a fast spurt in order to perhaps catch Miss Holligan at the entrance hall of the ten-storey building. He was still holding the torn note with her address in his hand. He put it in the side pocket of his jacket and pushed the lift button.

When the lift finally arrived at the ninth floor after a minute, Jupiter was still so lost in thought that he did not notice a man running towards the elevator. Just as the door was opening and Jupiter was about to enter the cabin, the man rushed in and collided with him. Jupiter apologized, although he was not sure if he was responsible for this mishap. They then both went down to the ground floor.

That afternoon, the First Investigator called his two partners, Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews, to Headquarters, the office of The Three Investigators. Headquarters was set up in an old mobile home trailer that stood in a corner of The Jones Salvage Yard operated by Jupiter's uncle Titus and aunt Mathilda. When Pete and Bob arrived there, Jupiter was already sitting on the comfortable wing chair pinching his lower lip. For the two investigators, this was clear indication that Jupiter was busy with tricky thought work.

"Well, Jupe, what happened that was so exciting?" Pete didn't seem at all enthusiastic that Jupe had called Bob and him for a meeting on a hot August afternoon. Actually he had a scheduled swimming training at that time. But after registering Jupiter's downcast face, he preferred to keep his displeasure to himself and postpone the 1000-metre swim program at the Rocky Beach Outdoor Pool until early evening.

"Fellows," Jupiter began and demonstratively laid a business card of their detective company on the table. "I hate to admit it, but I'm afraid I made a big mistake today." Meanwhile, Bob had taken off his jacket and sat next to Pete.

"Huh? What do you mean, Jupe?" Pete asked. "With all due respect, since when does the First Investigator make a mistake that he freely admits to? What happened?"

"I landed a client this morning who I'm not sure whether she needs our help or that of a psychotherapist." Jupe looked at his friends questioningly.

"To judge that, we need more details." Pete reached into the fruit bowl and bit heartily into a juicy nectarine.

"I happen to have witnessed a curious incident today." Jupe told Pete and Bob in detail about Miss Holligan and her uncanny experiences. However, he also mentioned that he was not quite sure whether the events described by the old lady had actually taken place in reality or only in her imagination. The two sat there quietly and listened eagerly to the report.

When Jupe finished, Bob took the floor. "I can understand, Jupe, that your curiosity is aroused. I think we should stay out of this."

"Bob's right," Pete agreed. "I think we should leave Miss Holligan to Dr Franklin. After all, she's a psychotherapist. I don't know exactly what that is, but at least she's the specialist,

not us.”

“Since when has that been our point of view?” Jupiter looked at Pete provocatively.

“Jupe, it’s no use.” Bob tried to appease him. “You really can’t blame us for avoiding such a case. I have to tell you honestly, we can really burn our fingers in this one. And not just that, we have no experience with mentally-ill people who are undergoing psychotherapeutic treatment. Frankly, it’s too scary for me.”

“And why, if I may ask?”

Bob was about to answer, but Pete beat him to it. “Do you know the movie ‘One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest’? It’s about sick people locked up in a closed psychiatric ward. They just talk crazy from morning till night and can’t tell reality from fantasy.”

“Wait a minute, Pete. I think you’re messing something up now.” The First Investigator was not known as a walking encyclopedia for nothing and regarded it as his obligation to reveal his knowledge, which admittedly was not yet too much in the field of psychiatry and psychotherapy.

“Firstly,” he began, “Miss Holligan is not in a closed psychiatric ward, but visits the clinic quite regularly. She voluntarily engaged a psychotherapist. And secondly, it does not prove that Miss Holligan is actually mentally-ill, especially since the term ‘mentally-ill’ can be easily misunderstood.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Bob asked.

“... That I can understand your reaction very well. Because when I found out this morning at the clinic that Miss Holligan was receiving psychotherapeutic treatment, I was literally choked up. And, of course, I was suspicious of what she was saying. At first I wasn’t really aware of it, but later I realized why.”

“I’d like to hear that, too,” Bob threw in.

“Your reaction is the best example. You’re being hostile to Miss Holligan even though you haven’t met her yet. And do you know why?”

Pete and Bob shrugged their shoulders wordlessly.

“Because the term ‘psycho’ for laypeople is usually clouded by prejudice.”

“Which, of course, you don’t count yourself,” Bob threw in loosely.

In the meantime, Pete had eaten his nectarine and threw the core into the waste bin.

“What does a psychotherapist actually do? Can somebody tell me that?”

“Expressed in simple words,” Jupiter began, “she deals with the problems of people who cannot cope with their reality and their surroundings. Together with the patient, the therapist tries to find a solution to the problem. Therefore, Miss Holligan undergoing therapy is perfectly logical and understandable.

“So from your accounts, the old lady seems to be better off there than with us,” Bob said.

“How can I understand that?” Jupiter was determined to fight the discussion to a satisfactory outcome.

“Well,” Bob continued. “On the surface, this sounds like a damn interesting case for The Three Investigators. The fact, however, is that Miss Holligan cut her finger through her own fault and her deceased sister is said to have got wind of it on the phone by commenting on this injury. To me, this is clear evidence that this woman is not ticking properly.”

“Miss Holligan is also convinced of that, otherwise she would probably not seek the help of a psychiatrist,” said Pete.

“A psychotherapist,” Jupe correct him.

“And what’s the difference, please?”

“The difference is in the training and the skills,” Jupiter replied. “Psychiatrists studied medicine and are therefore doctors. They usually work on tougher cases in the clinical field

and are also allowed to prescribe drugs. Psychotherapists studied psychology and then undergo therapy training. They mostly work in the social sector and often join group practices.”

Bob made no secret of his scepticism. “If we should go into this matter—and I emphasize if—the first thing I would do would be to go to the library and find out everything worth knowing about psychology, psychotherapy and the healing of those affected.”

“This could take weeks,” Pete threw in.

“Exactly,” Bob replied. “How long do you think a psychotherapist has to study and work before he gets to call himself that? The psyche, i.e. the soul of a human being, is still far from being sufficiently understood. And Jupe believes that we can handle a mentally-disturbed woman. I hate to repeat myself, but we should leave that to a trained specialist.”

“I clearly agree with you,” Jupiter replied. “But as long as it’s unclear whether Miss Holligan is actually mentally-disturbed, I don’t see why we shouldn’t get involved. Dr Franklin would probably need weeks, if not months, to attend to Miss Holligan, and even if she is a psychotherapist, who knows if she is the right person to help her.”

“You don’t actually let anyone change your mind, do you?” Bob remarked. “Can you maybe explain to us why?”

“Besides logic, I also follow my instincts. And it tells me that the situation stinks.” The First Investigator stood up and looked at his friends with a conspiratorial look. “Our company’s motto is ‘We Investigate Anything’ and I don’t see any reason why Miss Holligan shouldn’t use our services at the moment. I’m not even sure if it was right to offer the lady our help. But as long as it is not clear whether Miss Holligan has succumbed to a sensory delusion because she could not cope with her sister’s death, or whether someone is playing a game with her, we should not be guided by prejudice, but should proceed according to the strictest logic.”

“Good. I agree,” Pete finally agreed. “This thing interests me. But if there is a slightest indication that we are chasing after a non-existent phenomenon, or that this woman is simply disturbed, we’ll throw the case out. Is that clear?”

“Agreed.” Jupiter reached out his hand to Pete. “And what about you, Bob?”

“I’m in. After all, there is no risk in seeing the lady in person. However, I make one condition—I demand that we vote democratically in every step in Miss Holligan’s case. So 2:1 in our favour means that you are outvoted and not the other way around, as we are used to from you.”

“You have my word on it,” Jupiter said enthusiastically. “We’ll have to be patient until tomorrow afternoon,” he added. “Until then, we’ll wait to hear from Miss Holligan. If not, we’ll will pay her a surprise visit.”

Miss Holligan’s house was larger and more magnificent, at least in appearance, than Jupiter had expected. A huge, but barely planted garden stretched in front of the Victorian wooden villa, which was enclosed by a high wrought-iron fence.

As Jupiter had suspected, Miss Holligan had not called them, so the three detectives had taken the initiative to visit her as agreed between themselves. However, their plan to cycle from Rocky Beach to Malibu was thwarted by Mother Nature. The sky had darkened in the afternoon and opened its floodgates. There was an extraordinary summer storm all over the city, so the boys left their bikes at home and opted to be chauffeured by Pete in his MG.

The Second Investigator parked his car beside the gate to the driveway of the property and looked at the villa through the wet windscreen. The raindrops pelted down loudly on the

roof of the car. "Hey, I don't believe this!" Pete, an enthusiastic cinema fan, was visibly over the moon. "That's that creepy villa from the Hitchcock movie 'Psycho'! And this is where this Miss Holligan lives? Wow!"

"Psycho again." Bob slipped a little lower at the backseat to get a better view. He was visibly uncomfortable. "There is quite a distance to the front door. By the time we get there, we'll be soaked to the skin. Should we sit in the car and wait until it stops raining?"

At that moment it flashed and thunder sounded. The 'Psycho' villa shone for a fraction of a second and the jolt made Pete's MG vibrate.

"It's only fifty metres to the front door," Jupiter estimated. "If we run, we should be able to get there without getting too wet."

Without waiting for a reaction, Jupiter got out of the car and, after passing the front gate, ran through the pouring rain over puddles and mud holes towards Miss Holligan's house. Bob and Pete followed the First Investigator who had now found shelter from the rain on the porch.

Bob's hair was stuck on his forehead and his glasses, which he had exchanged for contact lenses in the morning, were completely wet with raindrops so he could hardly see anything.

"Is there a doorbell around here somewhere? If so, please do me a favour and tinker the old lady from her afternoon nap," Pete snapped.

Jupiter's gaze glided along the door frame. But a doorbell could not be found.

"Knock on the door then," Pete suggested. He carefully peered through the half-glazed entrance door, which was lined from the inside with lace curtains. Not much was visible from the outside, as it was dark inside.

"Probably nobody's home," Bob suspected.

"Wait and see," Jupiter replied, stepping to the front door and knocking vigorously on the glass. They struggled to hear anything from the house, while the thunderstorm outside became louder and more violent. Jupiter made a second attempt, but this time more vigorous. "Miss Holligan! Hello! Are you home? Miss Holligan!"

Silence.

"Jupe, Bob seems to be right," Pete said. "Nothing and nobody moves in the house."

"All right, fellows. Let's go back to the car and decide what to do next." Jupiter was about to follow Pete and Bob when he suddenly stopped and his eyes lit up. He heard shuffling footsteps from inside the villa slowly approaching the door.

## 5. An Insight into Psychotherapy

The three heard the distinct sound of the door being unlocked. Then it opened slowly with a security door chain still fastened on. Jupiter recognized the face of Miss Holligan, who looked suspiciously at The Three Investigators through her thick glasses.

“What do you want?” she asked harshly. It seemed to Jupiter that she was unable to recognize him.

“Hello, Miss Holligan.” Jupiter stepped closer to the door. “You remember me, don’t you? We met yesterday at the clinic and...”

“What do you want?” she repeated unkindly. “We weren’t supposed to meet.”

“Not in the conventional sense, Miss Holligan,” countered Jupiter. “But you gave me your address so we could get in touch. I, on the other hand, gave you our card.”

“I know that,” she replied, “but in my opinion I would contact you if necessary and not the other way round.”

“Does this mean you no longer need our help?” Jupiter said and then furtively glanced over to Pete and Bob. They both felt that their suspicions about Miss Holligan’s state of mind were confirmed.

Miss Holligan unfasten the security door chain and opened the door a little wider. The storm was still raging but she didn’t seem to want to ask the three into the house.

“Quite right,” she replied. “I really thank you for your sympathy and I am very sorry that you and your friends have made the long way here to help me. But I must inform you that there is nothing for you to investigate in this house. Now please go!”

Jupiter pondered why the old lady suddenly reacted so dismissively towards him but he was not ready to clear the field easily. “Does that mean your sister has stopped the abuse?”

Miss Holligan’s eyelids began to flutter nervously. “I don’t want to talk about it. Or rather, I shouldn’t do it anymore.”

“Who told you that?” Pete suddenly decided to join the conversation.

“My therapist. And I have now decided to rely exclusively on her help. I’m sorry, but I have to think about my health.”

“Wouldn’t it be advantageous to address this from two perspectives, ma’am?” Jupiter saw in his mind the case for The Three Investigators fading away into the far distance, but he did not want to give up. “Dr Franklin could continue her therapy from her professional field while Pete, Bob and I do our investigations here. We’ll watch for another attack, whoever or whatever is behind it.”

Miss Holligan hesitated for a moment. “I can’t do that. I need absolute calm. I’m already annoyed that I opened the door at all. Please don’t take this personally, but I need my time now just for myself.”

“Is this part of your therapy programme?” Jupiter felt that the conversation was coming to an end. But he really wanted more information.

The old lady’s feet began to sway restlessly. “Yes,” she replied. “I have to forget about it now. This is an important part of the therapy. I have a lot of catching up to do.”

“In the meantime, has anything strange happened to you?” Jupiter fervently hoped that Miss Holligan would answer that last question.

“You don’t have to apply that ‘salami tactic’ on me, young man. That won’t work. You have to accept things as they are.” She gave Jupiter a haunting look. “Please leave now. And don’t come back. Thank you.” She closed the door. The three then heard the lock turn and the security door chain fastened on again.

Rain was still drumming on the porch roof and gushing down the rain pipe to the ground ending with loud splashes.

“Now I see you speechless for the first time, Jupe.” Bob pushed his glasses up his nose, which he had earlier wiped with his T-shirt. “I’ll spare myself any further comment on this conversation.”

“We could have used the time better,” Pete added. “There’s a lot of work waiting for us at Headquarters. Once I think of the dishes, the... Hey, Jupe! Are you even listening to us? Jupe!”

The First Investigator had automatically started to pinch his lower lip. “Something’s wrong, fellows.”

“Well spoken, Jupe. But let’s get back on our magic carpet,” Pete snapped. “What’s the matter with you? This case isn’t for us. I can understand why you want to help this lady. But her reaction was more than clear. So let’s leave her alone!”

“The woman’s in a mess, it’s obvious,” Bob added. “But there’s nothing we can do about it. That’s the job of her therapist.”

“I suppose you’re right.” Jupiter sighed. “So let’s get back and do the dishes at Headquarters.”

“Sensible suggestion, Jupe.” Bob put his arm amicably around Jupe’s shoulder.

“Well, back to the car!” Pete started to run down the stairs and sprinted back at record speed, through the pouring rain, to his MG. Jupiter knew he had already lost this case. His chubby body wobbled like a jelly as he walked quickly, puffing over deep mud holes and puddles behind Bob.

Towards evening the thunderstorm had subsided. The rain on the ground of The Jones Salvage Yard had drained off considerably and the air was pleasantly fresh after the long shower.

Pete and Bob had tried in vain to cheer Jupiter up again during their clean-up at Headquarters.

Without a word thinking of Miss Holligan, he had dried several glasses and cups while many questions were still buzzing through his head. Why had the old lady withdrawn from the case? How did she intend to escape her sister’s tormenting with the help of a psychotherapist and what was meant by the remark about ‘salami tactics’? Did the whole thing make any sense at all, or had Miss Holligan actually had some fuses blown?

For Pete and Bob, the case was closed. After they had cleaned up Headquarters back into a respectable condition, they said goodbye and drove home. Jupiter also left the trailer and strolled across the salvage yard back to the Jones’s house, where he stayed with Uncle Titus and Aunt Mathilda.

Through the kitchen window he could see Aunt Mathilda busy setting the dinner table. Disgruntled, he entered the house and sat silently at the dining table. The First Investigator expected to be involved in a conversation with his talkative aunt, but this time he was wrong. She poured the tea into cups and called out to Uncle Titus, who was in the toilet trying to free his hands from the sticky oil he had come into contact with when messing with the engine of

his truck. With a reasonably satisfactory result, Jupiter's uncle finally trotted into the kitchen and looked at his wife. "Well," he asked. "Has Emily recovered?"

Aunt Mathilda sighed deeply. "Recovered would be an exaggeration. I think we should talk about something else. At least at the dining table."

Jupiter became curious. "What are you talking about?"

Uncle Titus gave Aunt Mathilda a very meaningful look. "Our nephew is old enough."

"Now you're really making me curious. What about Emily?" Jupiter remembered Aunt Mathilda's friend well. For many years she had had a close friendship with Emily, who was employed in Lake Tahoe as a housekeeper. Some time ago, Aunt Mathilda was filling in for her friend because Emily had been hospitalized for a serious accident.

"When the doctors examined Emily at that time for severe fractures from the accident, they found that she was in a much worse condition than just fractures." Aunt Mathilda paused, then she added: "The diagnosis was cancer. A malignant tumour in the abdomen. And if you now ask me why I didn't tell to you about it, Jupe, I can only say that it was at Emily's specific request. She didn't want to alarm anyone with it. Not even me. But then, fortunately, she decided differently."

"What did she choose to do?"

Aunt Mathilda optimistically stirred the spoon in her teacup. "There are certain chances of defeating this disease, and one of them is that Emily is undergoing talk therapy in addition to the really unpleasant chemotherapy."

"This means," Uncle Titus explained, "that in addition to medical help, psychological help is also offered as support. The realization that one's own body is affected with potentially fatal disease throws many people out of their mental equilibrium. All of a sudden they find themselves confronted with death, although shortly before they were flourishing life itself."

"That's right," Aunt Mathilda added. "Talk therapy enables a patient to accept the illness and to deal with it. For example, a person learns to see cancer as a fact and still gain something positive from life—which, at this point in time, seems almost impossible to the sick."

Aunt Mathilda was desperately looking for simpler words.

"What I mean to say is that a person's emotional state, which is severely affected, could be restored by the therapist in order to support healing in the body. I'll explain it to you with an example.

"If you have to take a difficult class test tomorrow and you get sick because of the fear of the exam, you should tell yourself, besides the medication you take, that your fear of the seemingly difficult exam questions is only a hindrance. And that's for your body and your mind. Talk to me or your friends about it instead."

"If you're not affected yourself, aunt, it's easy for you to say. It's always easier to philosophically look at the worries of others than one's own," Jupiter replied, remembering quite clearly the pain he had suffered before and during the last sports competition in which he involuntarily took part.

But Aunt Mathilda continued unperturbed. "Of course, a class test cannot be compared to a serious illness. But basically, it is the same thing. Talking well to a person during a tough phase in life often works wonders. You have to deal with the problems in life. But some people don't have the courage. And this help is provided by talking therapy. With such help, Emily had survived the worst and is slowly on the road to recovery. The tumours have receded and her mental balance is stable again.

“That Emily finally confided in you her illness,” Jupiter asked, “do you mean that’s due to talking therapy?”

“I don’t just mean it, I know it. The therapist told her not to suppress feelings and to speak freely about all fears and worries. Under no circumstances should she isolate herself from her fellow human beings. And that’s why Emily started talking openly to me about her illness. Of course, trust was the basic prerequisite.”

In the meantime, Uncle Titus had gotten his hands dirty and piled up bread, cheese and sausage on his plate. That reminded Jupiter of Miss Holligan’s ‘salami tactic’ phrase.

“Aunt Mathilda,” he asked, “what would happen if the therapist prescribed exactly the opposite for the patient?”

“Hmm, what do you mean by the opposite?”

“For example, to shut yourself up to your fellow human beings, remain silent and withdraw.”

“What nonsense! That’s what we were just talking about.” Aunt Mathilda looked at Jupiter in an instructive way. “That’s exactly what a therapist wants to prevent.”

“So you are firmly convinced that there is no such therapeutic method as the one I have just described?” Jupiter asked.

Now Aunt Mathilda became insecure. But finally she shook her head. “I’m sure a serious therapist wouldn’t prescribe such a thing. That would be downright reprehensible. Who told you such nonsense?”

“I went to Dr Hendrixen’s for a check-up yesterday, and I got into a conversation with a patient of Dr Franklin’s.”

“She was Emily’s therapist, too. An absolute expert!” Aunt Mathilda was just getting enthusiastic. “And she is supposed to have prescribed such nonsense? You probably can’t believe that yourself! Are you sure you didn’t hear it wrongly? I don’t know how this patient even comes up with telling you this, but if it’s true, it throws all my understanding out of the window.”

Jupiter couldn’t agree more. He had a bad feeling about the whole thing. Miss Holligan’s accounts did not want to disappear from his mind.



## 6. Invisible Talk Guests

“We had agreed to vote democratically, Jupe! Bob and I are against it.” Pete joined Bob conspiratorially.

After talking to his aunt and uncle, the First Investigator had barely closed his eyes the night before and decided around two o’clock in the morning to have another meeting with his two partners.

Now Pete and Bob were sitting at their Headquarters and Jupiter explained to them his doubts about Dr Franklin’s dubious therapy prescription. The fact that Aunt Mathilda agreed with Jupiter’s observations did not seem to interest Pete in any way. He fervently hoped that Bob would not disappoint him when it came to a vote.

“I’m against it!” The Second Investigator demonstratively raised his arm. “Come on, Bob. Say something about it.”

Bob shrugged sheepishly. “I’m not quite sure now. Somehow I can understand both of you...”

“This can’t be happening!” Pete literally threw his arms up in the air. “What kind of trip are you on, anyway? In the clinic, Jupe met an obviously mentally-confused woman who hears voices and gave a case to him, only to withdraw it when we went to see her, in my view, for understandable reasons. And what’s Jupe planning? He wants to force himself into the private life of this lady, although she gave us a very clear rebuff yesterday.”

“What do you think made Miss Holligan send us away?” Jupiter asked provocatively.

“Have you ever realized that there are people who feel differently from you?” Pete gave Jupiter an accusing look and immediately took over the answer. “Probably not, with your assertive behaviour that gets on people’s nerves. There are moments in life when a person don’t want to talk to anyone. Not even to you, Jupe. It’s probably hard for you to accept, but I think it should go into your thick skull. Well, for myself, I can understand the old lady pretty well.”

Stunned, Jupiter let this lecture go over him and for a moment he even lacked the words to counter Pete’s accusation.

“Now you have a point, Pete,” Bob stepped in. “But you shouldn’t forget that Jupe’s pushy way has often helped us out of trouble in many cases. And on this point, if Dr Franklin’s therapeutic approach is what Miss Holligan had described, then I’m afraid I have to agree with Jupe. I, too, feel that there’s something seriously flawed in this approach.”

“What?” Pete exclaimed. “Could you explain that to us in more detail?”

“What I have to say on the matter, will certainly interest you. I was gathering material in the library earlier on the subject of voices from nowhere.”

“You have already made inquiries in this case? Well done!” Jupiter looked proudly over at his friend. “So let’s hear it!”

Bob sat cross-legged on the wide armchair. “The phenomenon of perceiving voices that other fellow human beings cannot hear is more widespread than I myself assumed. According to statistics, five percent of the entire world population suffer from this—one must really say —‘fact’.

“And medicine has not yet succeeded in providing a physical or otherwise plausible explanation for this. It must be mentioned that even Johann Wolfgang Goethe used to have interesting discussions with imaginary partners. Also Robert Louis Stevenson, the author of ‘Treasure Island’ and ‘Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’, had invisible talk guests in his head, whom he gave the name ‘Brownies’ for fun. So you see that Miss Holligan is not alone with her suffering, if it is suffering.

“On the contrary, brain researchers, psychologists and psychiatrists have been trying to understand this for ages without reaching a satisfactory result. Medicine here is still at the stage of basic research. In simple terms, this means that scientists do not agree on whether this phenomenon is a disease, a gift, a divine spark or simply a disorder of the brain function. However, the specialists among them are aware of one thing—this phenomenon does not count as mental illness. This has been proven by countless trials and tests that patients have voluntarily undergone.

“One can only say with certainty—when people who hear inner voices withdraw and things become quiet around them, the voices become louder. That is why psychotherapists are very concerned that their patients do not isolate themselves from their fellow human beings. And that means I have to agree with Jupe and Aunt Mathilda. Dr Franklin’s treatment seems rather questionable to me. For if—and I emphasize if—she had really ordered Miss Holligan to retreat and not talk to any outsiders—in this case, us—about the voices, then there is something fishy going on. This is why I agree that this needs investigation.”

“Excellent, Bob,” praised Jupiter. “You have the same suspicion as me. Your research is clearly consistent with Aunt Mathilda’s accounts and my suspicions. Only one thing gives me headaches.”

“And what would that be?” Bob asked curiously.

“Aunt Mathilda holds Dr Franklin in high esteem,” Jupe elaborated. “After all, the therapist had made great progress with her treatment method with Emily. With the help of talk therapy, she was able to reduce her fear of the disease and provide her body with the necessary support for recovery. With Miss Holligan, on the other hand, the situation is exactly the opposite, because fears cannot be diminished by demarcation and defence. On the contrary! And I wonder how Dr Franklin intends to treat the old lady’s problem.”

“Maybe Miss Holligan was creating an excuse for something else,” Pete replied. “For example, if my mother doesn’t feel like talking on the phone, but is being called by her aunt, she may break off the conversation prematurely on the grounds that she is tired or has a headache. Although this is not the case at all. There are situations where you don’t want to communicate with another person. No reason. Just like that.”

“I know that,” Jupiter replied. “But you should have seen Miss Holligan’s face when I suggested we take the case. In our entire detective career so far, I have come across not many clients who have responded so gratefully to our services as she had. The old lady has a serious problem and I’m relying on my gut. And that tells me that Miss Holligan didn’t leave us like this by her own free will.”

“Then you think her explanation for the therapy program was just a pretext?” Bob was thinking. “An interesting theory. But what makes you say that?”

“For me, there are only two possibilities,” concluded Jupiter. “Either we were dismissed yesterday by Miss Holligan as a precautionary measure, or she was forced to.”

“What makes you think of possibility number one?” Bob wanted to know.

“It’s simple.” Jupiter put on an important face.

“Metzla Holligan, her allegedly deceased sister, doesn’t seem to be squeamish about her abusive behaviour. Miss Holligan may be trying to protect us from her.”

"But the dead woman wants to take her sister Abigail, not us, to the afterlife," Pete remarked,

"That is undoubtedly true. But consider how easily we could get into the line of fire if Metzla, or whoever pretends to be her, were to carry out her attacks. Of course, the old lady cannot know whether we could have handled the situation with certainty. We have to convince her first."

"And possibility number two?" Bob asked interestedly.

"That would be that Miss Holligan mentioned to third parties that she hired us as detectives. This could not fit into the concept of the great unknown. Maybe she was ordered to keep away from us."

"Metzla Holligan," Bob combined. "Would she be the deceased sister who may not be dead at all?"

"We can confidently dismiss this theory. Abigail Holligan had closed the eyes of her sister Metzla herself on her deathbed." Jupiter's brain was now working at full speed.

"All right," Pete threw in. "Suppose we can believe Miss Holligan's words. Then the whole story comes down to one thing—someone wants to drive the old lady mad. He hires a voice imitator, and she starts tormenting Miss Holligan on the phone until the old lady is finally incapacitated or even dies of heart failure."

"Exactly," Jupiter replied, secretly pleased that Pete now seemed to be interested in the case after all.

"And how did the voice on the phone know that Miss Holligan had cut her finger?" Bob recalled this unsolved question to his two friends.

"I've already racked my brains on that." Jupiter rose from his chair and walked restlessly in circles in the narrow trailer. "How do we turn this around? Our suspicions lead to nowhere unless we do some investigations on site. And in plain language, that means we have to get Miss Holligan to put all her cards on the table."

"And how would do that?" Pete asked. "Are you trying to force her to?"

"In a way, yes." Jupiter was confident.

"We'll make a second attempt. Drive to Malibu and confront Miss Holligan with our knowledge regarding talk therapy. Let's see how she reacts. We tell her that with our investigation we have found out exactly the opposite of what she wanted us to believe. And then we'll wait and see what she says."

"That sounds pretty massive, Juve," Pete remarked. Secretly, however, he was keen to see the inside of Miss Holligan's home, the 'Psycho' villa.

"Exceptional circumstances require exceptional action," Jupiter underlined his plan and added, "If Miss Holligan gives us a second rebuff in spite of what we tried, we'll keep our hands off this case. I promise you that. Then we're out of luck, and so would she. But I think we are going to get somewhere this time."

"And where do you get that assurance from?" Pete looked at Jupiter questioningly.

"Unlike Miss Holligan, I trust my inner voice."

"Agreed, Juve. You can count on me!" With zest for action, Bob grabbed his jacket and gave Pete an encouraging look. "This matter has been resolved democratically. I suggest we set off right away to get to grips with this therapy story. If we really make progress in this case, I'm seriously considering taking a course in psychotherapy!"

"I'm with you," joked Pete. "Our company logo could also be adopted and attached to our practice with a large sign. After all, what could be more natural than to mark the unknown in psychology with three question marks?"

Miss Holligan's house did not seem as gloomy and disastrous on this sunny morning as on the previous stormy day.

Jupiter gasped and sweated. Pete and Bob had overruled him—also democratically—to cover the long distance from Rocky Beach to Malibu by bike. Now they had finally reached their destination and chained their bikes to the fence on the dusty forecourt.

As the day before, the three detectives entered the porch and Jupiter knocked on the glass pane of the front door. A few seconds passed. Then the three heard the usual steps approaching the door. The lock was turned and Miss Holligan opened the door with the security door chain in place. A quick look into her eyes immediately signalled to the First Investigator that the old lady was still not ready to welcome The Three Investigators.

Jupiter used his most optimistic smile. "Miss Holligan," he began, "I know you want your peace and quiet. And we have no intention to ignore this desire. But I was awake half the night yesterday, dealing with a question that only you can answer."

"What's that?" Now the old lady looked up and looked at Jupiter curiously.

"I asked all my friends and studied several encyclopaedias, but did not find what I was looking for. The term you confronted us with yesterday is absolutely foreign to me and I would like to ask you to tell me what it means." Inside, Jupiter was tensed.

"What term are you talking about?" Miss Holligan adjusted her glasses.

"'Salami tactic'. The three of us know what a 'salami' is. But in what sense does a tactic hide behind a sausage?"

Pete and Bob had trouble smothering a grin. They found Jupiter's question rather odd. The old lady, however, seemed much more astonished that the term was unfamiliar to them.

"Have you three ever heard of privacy?" As usual, Miss Holligan did not wait for an answer, but answered her question herself. "Probably not, otherwise you'd be familiar with the term 'salami tactic'."

"Could you perhaps explain that a little more precisely?" Bob asked carefully.

For a brief moment, a smile flitted across her face as her eyes examined Jupiter's full stature.

"Imagine you've decided to lose weight. You open the fridge and grab a tempting salami. Of course, you do realize that you're not supposed to eat any of it. It would be contradictory to your diet. But you still cut yourself a thin slice because you think one small slice is okay. You continue to play this little game until you have finally cleaned away the salami completely.

"And that's what you are doing to me. Your attempts to get information out of me is like cutting off slice by slice from me, even though I don't want to allow it. So I ask that you leave me alone."

"But that could be applied to many things in life, ma'am," Jupiter replied. "It is far from our intention to compete intellectually against the views of professionals, but the fact is that we humans all advance 'slice by slice'—whether we have to read a book, have a discussion or study for a history class. So if you compare our interpersonal interaction with the slicing of a salami, it goes without saying."

Pete was amazed at Jupiter's statement and noticed that Miss Holligan's initial rejection seemed to be dwindling. But before he could tie in with Jupiter's opinion, a shrill, deafening smash sounded from the house.

Miss Holligan's eyes widened in horror before she suddenly whirled around and looked up the stairs from where the sound had come. Then she looked pleadingly and helplessly at the three detectives. "You have to help me... Please! Metzla has returned!" Her voice trembled. "She wants to kill me!"



## 7. Close to Madness

Mindlessly, Miss Holligan stepped aside and showed Jupiter, Bob and Pete the way to the upper floor with a gesture of her hand. The three of them then stormed up the stairs.

The door to a room was open. They could see that the room was all around equipped with filled bookshelves. Glittering glass splinters were scattered all over the carpet and the curtain in front of the window fluttered in the draught blowing in through the broken window pane. Jupiter hurried to the window and quickly looked out. He saw no one far and wide—no figure in the rather sparse vegetation, and also no car on the street.

Pete looked around the library attentively. He searched the entire floor for an object that could have broken the window pane. But he found nothing.

Miss Holligan had followed The Three Investigators and now hesitantly entered her library. The First Investigator looked at the old lady with a bewildered expression on his face. He didn't know how to react at that moment.

"We... we should call the glazier," he said, embarrassedly.

"That's all you can think of, Jupe?" Again the Second Investigator let his eyes glide over the ground. "Where is the stone or whatever that was used to smash the window with? Can your super brain explain that to me?"

The shards of glass crunched under her shoes as Miss Holligan joined Jupiter at the window. "There is no logical explanation for this," she remarked. But she didn't seem entirely convinced by her own words.

"We don't believe in that, Miss Holligan," Bob replied. "Even though it may seem so for the time being."

"As it is now, we can see that the window pane was not broken from the inside of the room," Jupiter said, "because then the shards would have gone outwards. We can see that the shards are inside the room."

"Miss Holligan," Jupiter turned to her. "We'd better look around in the other rooms since we are up here. Of course, only if it's all right with you, ma'am."

"Please do," Miss Holligan replied. "I'll show you the other rooms." She walked out and the three followed her into an adjoining room.

Miss Holligan wanted to say something, but suddenly Jupiter startled, put his finger to his lips and signalled to the others to be quiet. A strange squeak was heard, rumbling and humming. They frantically looked around the room to search for the source of the noise. Suddenly, Bob cried: "Hey, that sound seems to be coming from the library. Let's go back in there!"

They rushed out into the hallway and back into the library to look around. The humming sound has stopped.

They looked around the library again. Bob stepped against the wall and pointed to two wooden flaps with metal handles. "Is that a food elevator, Miss Holligan?"

"That's right," replied the old lady. "More specifically, it is called a dumbwaiter. The previous owner of the house shut it down because it was no longer functional. I don't need that kind of bells and whistles anyway. But what seems more important to me is why..."

"Quick!" Jupiter suddenly shouted, interrupting her. "Down to the kitchen!"

The First Investigator rushed out of the library, closely followed by Pete and Bob. He jumped several steps at the same time as he ran down the stairs. Arriving at the bottom, he instinctively tore open the door to the kitchen and stared stunned into the cart of the food elevator. It was empty!

“What’s going on here?” Irritated, Jupiter let his gaze wander around the kitchen. “There’s nobody here! But someone must have set the elevator in motion! But this door was closed as is the window here. If he’d left the kitchen, we’d probably would have seen him. Unfortunately, we also came out down a bit too late.”

Now Miss Holligan also came into the kitchen. She gasped for air and wiped beads of sweat off her forehead. “But... but... why is the food elevator door opened? The flaps were nailed shut and the door couldn’t be opened at all! I know that for sure!” Hesitantly she went closer and looked inside the ancient machine. “If you really want to help me, now you know what you’re getting into. Metzla is wandering around this house as an angel of revenge and will not rest until I am underground.”

“It is also possible that an intruder has access into the house in some way and may... still be hiding somewhere here,” Pete remarked.

“Oh, goodness!” Miss Holligan’s eyes widened. “Don’t say that. Where do you suppose he is hiding without me knowing?”

“Who has a key to this house?” Pete asked suddenly and looked intently at Miss Holligan.

“Nobody! Except me, of course.”

“Could someone have obtained a duplicate key?” Jupiter asked.

“No, I have never given anyone the key or a duplicate one. Also, I have a home alarm system for the two entrances and the windows. I set it on whenever I go out, and only I know the security code.”

“But the food elevator cannot start moving on its own,” Bob remarked.

“Correct,” Jupiter said. “Does this thing go down to a basement, or is the kitchen the end of the line?” He went down on his knees and looked for any traces the intruder might have left behind.

“This house has no basement,” Miss Holligan replied. “It has only two floors and a small attic.”

“Do you know how this elevator was set in motion in the past?” asked Jupiter.

The old lady shuffled to the sideboard over which a long worn cord hung. “If you pulled this cord, the cart would go to the first floor. But as I said, this old thing is no longer in operation—or that’s what I thought.”

“Excuse me, ma’am.” Bob stepped closer and tugged the cord with a strong jerk. It immediately squeaked and rumbled. Then the cart went up to the top floor.

“So it’s still working,” Jupiter said. He stuck his head between the elevator doors and looked up the empty shaft. “There’s nobody here. And yet someone must have set it in motion.”

“But I swear to you,” Miss Holligan raised her hand, “I always thought that the elevator mechanism was out of order.”

“Then someone must have got it going again without you knowing,” Pete suspected.

“The only question is who and why?”

Bob tugged the rope again. “But there’s still the possibility that you haven’t tugged it hard enough. Maybe something had gotten stuck.” The cart came down the shaft and stopped.

“Miss Holligan,” Jupiter said. “We have to look around your house inside and outside.”

“Please do. Please do so immediately!” The old lady went ahead and stepped out into the hallway. “I have no secrets from you. Look behind every door and roll every carpet to the side. If an intruder was in here, please track him down!”

“We should spread out now.” Jupiter gave clear instructions. “Pete, you look around the garden. Locate the location from where the intruder may have thrown something to break the window pane and look for footprints and similar traces. Bob and I are going to have a look around inside.”

While Jupiter, Bob and Miss Holligan started searching inside the house, Pete went into the garden and inspected the grounds. But nowhere was there a trace. The intruder, if any, seemed to have proceeded carefully.

Some time later, the three detectives and Miss Holligan sat down in the old lady’s living room, dejected and debated how an intruder could have managed to act without being discovered. However, they did not come to any conclusion.

“I have to admit, ma’am, that our theories cannot be substantiated.” Jupiter reached into a bowl of biscuits on the table and thoughtfully nibbled on a biscuit. “Please don’t think I’m indiscreet, but I think the intruder can only be after one thing. So my question to you is, are you wealthy, Miss Holligan?”

“You mean someone’s after my money?” The old lady put her teacup down. “But the person can wait a long time. I’ve already settled everything in my will. After my death, my entire property would be transferred to a foundation for cancer patients. I have seen my sister suffer for a long time and hope to be able to help other people fight this terrible disease. So you see, there’s nothing to get from me.”

“However, it is questionable whether the intruder knows that,” Bob thought. “And what about your sister’s textile factory? Who owns it now?”

“When Metzla learned of her illness, she transferred the company to me.” Miss Holligan took the glasses off her nose and rubbed her tired eyes. “At first, I didn’t quite understand, because she hated me so much. But then I quickly found out. The financial situation of the factory was very bad. She was in the red. I guess Metzla wanted to give me the problem. Fortunately, I found a clever entrepreneur who put the company back on the road to success.”

“If there’s nothing financially to be gained from you, ma’am,” Pete concluded, “then there must be another reason for these attacks. But we can safely rule out revenge from the afterlife.”

“I’m not entirely convinced yet,” Miss Holligan replied. “But I hope you’re right. Whatever it is, I’m feel much more comfortable now since you’re taking up this case.”

“What other purpose could the intruder have?” Bob threw around.

“Maybe somebody’s making a bad joke.” Pete suggested, even though he was not particularly convinced of this possibility. But in his thought it could not hurt to consider it.

“What’s the joke?” Jupiter gave the Second Investigator a sharp look.

“Well,” he replied. “This house here is very similar to the villa from Alfred Hitchcock’s horror movie ‘Psycho’. After all, it would be possible that someone had the grisly idea to teach Miss Holligan the screaming. Just like that. Just for fun! After all, the movie was also about a dead woman who was given the impression that she was still alive. You have to admit, there are certain parallels.”

“Nonsense,” Miss Holligan replied. “I’ve never seen the movie. I don’t watch scary movies, but I don’t think Richard would go that far.”

Jupiter looked at the old lady with interest. “Who on earth is Richard?”

“An old friend of mine and a fanatical fan of old Hollywood movies. He had this house rebuilt in the sixties, after ‘Psycho’ achieved world success.” Miss Holligan pointed to a



framed photo on a desk. "That is Richard. He lived in this villa for over thirty years. He was a strange fellow, but a hundred percent friend."

"And where does he live now?" Bob looked at the photo and felt a certain sympathy for the man who had a bald head and mischievous impish eyes.

"He fell in love with a young woman while on a trip to Europe and now lives with her in Italy. I liked this house even though, as I said, I've never seen that scary movie. I bought this house from him without thinking much about it. We were friends, and he would never sink so low as to drive me crazy. Besides, he knows I have a weak heart."

"Perhaps, has anyone made you an offer for this property recently that you have declined?" asked Jupiter.

Miss Holligan shook her head. "No, no! I'm not in trouble with anyone either, nor have I been guilty of anything. These creepy events must have been for some other reason. I'm absolutely sure!"

"We cannot be certain of any of our previous theories unless proven otherwise," the First Investigator remarked. "Who else enters and leaves this house other than you? I mean, do you have a housekeeper or do you employ a cleaning lady or gardener?"

"No," Miss Holligan replied indignantly. "I may be old, but I'm not so old that I couldn't take care of my own home."

"Do friends come to visit you now and then?" Jupiter persisted.

"The friends I had are no longer alive." The old lady's voice went down. "Richard sends a postcard from Italy twice a year. That's all. With age, loneliness draws into the soul and it is not easy to make new friends. I get suspicious and withdraw from people easily. The price I had to pay for this is depression."

"Depression?" Pete asked interested. "How does that come about?"

"Loneliness. Silence. A deep-seated sadness that makes you bitter inside. And the worst thing about it is the powerlessness of not being able to do anything about it. I often just sit here and cry. And mostly I don't even know why. This silence... and this empty house..." Miss Holligan swallowed. "I had hoped a change of location would do me good. But I guess that was a fallacy. Sometimes everything seems so pointless... that I don't want to live here anymore..."

Jupiter, Pete and Bob were affected emotionally and did not know what to say. They couldn't really place the old lady's state of mind. On one hand she seemed so energetic and full of energy, but then something seemed to change in her and suddenly she was just a heap of misery.

Suddenly the phone rang. It shrilled so loudly that Miss Holligan startled and was ripped from her melancholic thoughts. "Metzla!" she cried. "That's her! I can feel it!" The lower jaw of the old lady quivered incessantly now, while it rang continuously. Although her suspicion had not yet been confirmed, Miss Holligan seemed close to another anxiety attack. She grabbed her heart and her face was contorted with pain.

Miss Holligan pointed to the still ringing phone. "I want to know who that is now!"

Jupiter jumped up reached for the phone and brought it closer to her. "Answer it, Miss Holligan. The phone has a speaker feature. I'll press the button when you pick it up!"

The old lady understood and nodded. Then her wrinkled hand reached for the phone.

## 8. The Lost Son

Jupiter pressed the speaker button and the three listened attentively. Nothing happened at first.

Then they all heard it—a crazy, over-excited laugh of an old woman's voice who didn't stop. Pete got goose bumps and looked tensed.

Miss Holligan's eyes widened in horror as she screamed loudly and hysterically into the receiver. "Leave me alone, Metzla!" Her voice cracked. "I want you to leave me alone! You hear that? What have I done to you?"

Then the laughter calmed down and then they heard rapid and violent breathing for a few seconds. "Abigail... I hate you and I will not rest until you have received your last rites, you old bitch! ... I will take revenge for what you've done to me." The voice laughed again. "Running away doesn't do you any good, you hear? You can hide like a cockroach. I'll track you down and crush you with my fingers! You've got yourself to blame!"

Miss Holligan groaned and clawed her left hand into the armrest of a chair. "How can you hate me so profoundly? Answer me!"

The eerie voice did not respond, instead a scornful laughter broke out for a few seconds. Then it cracked, and the line was disconnected.

Stunned, Miss Holligan continued to hold on to the phone with her trembling hand. She looked absently into the faces of The Three Investigators.

Jupiter took the phone from her and hung it up for her. "Extremely charming, your sister," he remarked dryly. "Was that her voice?"

"There... there is no doubt about it," she stammered, still staring at the phone, as if she expected that it would ring again. But the phone remained silent.

Miss Holligan pulled out a small bottle from her pocket, opened it and dripped a few drops of some liquid onto her tongue. When the boys tried to help her, the old lady was already in control again.

The First Investigator then walked restlessly up and down the living room, pinching his lower lip incessantly and nervously. "Somebody's playing a sadistic game with you. And we must also assume that your sister is involved."

"Jupe, you don't mean... Metzla may not be..." Pete didn't dare say what he thought.

"We are certain that Metzla is no longer with us now," Jupe explained. "But it is possible that before her death she helped to set the whole thing up."

"And how's that supposed to work?" Bob looked at Jupiter provocatively.

"Somebody just plays a recording of her voice to create the illusion that it came from the afterlife," Jupiter elaborated. "The simplest methods are usually the most effective."

"So you think that's how it was done?" Miss Holligan rose from the chair with a crack in her knee joints and stood in front of Jupiter. "It's very simple, yes? Then I'd have many questions for you three here."

"Go for it!" Jupiter did not let himself be disturbed.

"So you're still assuming they're recordings, right?"

"You confirm that the voice on the phone was undoubtedly your sister's, and you also closed her eyes on her deathbed as you said... Yes, there's no other way." A spark of

superiority jumped out of Jupiter's eyes.

Miss Holligan's face was motionless and she glanced in turn at Jupiter, Pete and Bob. "There's three of you so I'll ask three questions. I cut my finger and my sister commented on that on the phone. I'm not very well versed in technology, but how is that supposed to work with a recording?" Jupiter looked at the old lady speechless.

Now Miss Holligan looked unmistakably at Pete, whose mouth was still open. She continued unperturbed. "My window was smashed and the food elevator sets itself in motion as if by itself, even though nobody but us was in the house. How can this be explained logically?"

Bob suspected that the next question would be addressed to him. He was right about that assumption.

"You just heard Metzla's voice. I tell you—the way she sounded on the phone earlier, coughing and croaking, I only experienced that once—shortly before she passed away. And even weeks before that, Metzla would not have been able to take part in a conspiracy against me. You may not know, but believe me, the tumour was already far too advanced. Metzla could no longer think clearly. So please answer this one last question—is a terminally-ill person in delusion still be able to discuss voice recordings and then hide them from me? Metzla slept in her own bed. I was there and cleaned her the room almost everyday. There was nothing!"

There was a long silence. The Three Investigators felt embarrassed. They were detectives, but you couldn't answer any of the old lady's questions. They looked at each other in awe and everyone secretly hoped that one of them could explain at least one of the mysterious events to Miss Holligan. However, they had to pass.

The old lady began to clear the empty teacups from the table. That gesture was clear. "If you could answer even one of the questions I have asked in a plausible and comprehensible way, I will leave the case to you. But I think that..."

Jupiter was, as always, concerned with the pride of The Three Investigators and he didn't want to be dismissed by Miss Holligan yet again. So he quickly stepped forward and spoke to her. "We will not disappoint you, ma'am. Now, if you don't mind my saying so, we're going back for a discussion. But you'll be hearing from us very soon."

"All right." Miss Holligan went to the front door and opened it. "Then go do your homework. If you have answers, please get in touch. I'm tired and I have to lie down now."

The Three Investigators stepped out to the porch and were about to say goodbye when Miss Holligan took a few steps forward to her mailbox and looked into it. She pulled out an envelope and looked at it from both sides. Her gaze changed suddenly as she quickly ripped open the envelope, took out the letter, unfolded it and started reading. For over a minute, she made strange sounds as the three silently looked on. Jupiter began to shiver despite the summer temperatures. They saw that Miss Holligan was struck by a sudden deep sadness and at the same moment tears rolled down her eyes.

"Miss Holligan, what's the matter?" he asked carefully and gently brushing her arm.

Without a word, she handed him the letter, stepped back to the porch and stared into the setting sun with a lost gaze. Pete and Bob looked over Jupiter's shoulder as he slowly unfolded the letter and began to read it.

*Dear Miss Abigail Holligan,*

*For many weeks, if not months, I have been sitting at my desk in front of an empty sheet of paper, trying to express with words something that has been circling in my head for a*

*long time.*

*My name won't tell you anything. Neither would my appearance today. And yet I believe with some certainty that you have never forgotten me. Actually, I wanted to get in touch with you personally, but I don't know if you would want to see me again at all. This idea fills me with fear, but I could accept it.*

*I am 54 years old. My parents died in a car accident four years ago and they left me with a big lie. In their estate, I came across documents that I have been dealing with day and night for a long time. I searched for more evidences and only recently, I found out the truth. I was adopted. Today I wish for nothing more than to finally be able to see my biological mother and to embrace her in my arms.*

*Your son, Ron.*

*PS. I'll get back to you.*

Jupiter folded the handwritten letter and handed it back to Miss Holligan, who was still holding on to the railing as tears continue to run down her face.

"Excuse me, ma'am..." he began, but the old lady turned away from him.

"Please leave now," she sobbed.

The three paused a while looking at Miss Holligan, and then Jupiter signalled to the other two to quietly leave. When the First Investigator was walking down the driveway, he looked back and saw that the old lady was still standing at the she porch staring into the distance...

## 9. A Case for the Couch

“We embarrassed ourselves to the bone!” Bob vented his anger and hit the edge of the table so hard with his fist that the entire trailer vibrated. “This can’t be happening!”

The Three Investigators sat at Headquarters and looked at each other helplessly. They could only claim a partial success so far by being able to get Abigail Holligan back as their client. But they had still not made it to the core of this dark affair.

“Now let’s get back to the matter on hand,” Jupiter tried to calm Bob down. “I admit that we should have taken care of this a little more thoroughly, but I don’t think we should postpone it any further.”

“Like go back to where it all started?” the Second Investigator remarked.

“You’ve got it, Pete,” Jupiter replied. “And that’s where I should have started.”

“Where should you have started?” Bob asked.

“I should have gone to the ladies’ toilet immediately to inspect. But Dr Miller pulled me back by my sweater and denied me access in there.”

“Which is no wonder...” Bob had calmed down in the meantime and filled the kettle to make tea.

“Actually I should have called Lys. Had there been a hidden device in the toilet to create the voice of Miss Holligan’s sister, Lys would have found it.” Jupiter thought highly of his girlfriend.

Lys de Kerk was a young actress who became famous for the leading role in a series of movies. Jupe had come to know and appreciate her during a previous case of The Three Investigators. She had already helped the three of them out of tight spots on several occasions and had contributed to the solution of many cases.

“You couldn’t have known at that point that something sinister was going on,” Bob tried to console the First Investigator.

“Three days have passed since our first visit to Miss Holligan, and we’re as smart as we were before,” Pete said. “Do you know what kind of responsibility we’re taking on? If Metzla Holligan does not stop her harassments against her sister or if she does something more drastic than before, we might soon have a dead person on our account!”

Jupiter agreed with Pete’s opinion. “I agree with that. There is an intention behind the attacks and I assume that there is more than just a bad joke. If this goes on, we’ll have to expect the worst.”

“And what do you think that would be?” Pete felt a queasy feeling in his stomach.

“I have the suspicion that Miss Holligan might be taken out of the way—an attempted murder in stages.”

“If that is really true, we must inform Chief Reynolds or Inspector Cotta immediately and leave the case to them,” Pete said seriously.

The Three Investigators often worked together with the Rocky Beach Police, in particular, Chief Reynolds and Inspector Cotta. In many of their previous cases, the three had provided the police with important evidences or information about criminals. In turn, the two police officers has helped them with their investigations.

“Murder is not our speciality, and if Miss Holligan actually died, I could never forgive myself!” Pete remarked.

“But as I said, it’s just a suspicion,” confirmed the First Investigator. “Miss Holligan has already been to the police... but they sent the old lady home.”

“A lot has happened in the meantime and we were even there ourselves.” Pete made no secret of his concerns. “The police must be notified. After all, we can testify that we heard her dead sister on the phone!”

“Strictly speaking, we only heard her sister’s voice, Pete,” Jupiter corrected him. “I like Miss Holligan in spite of her strange idiosyncrasies. And I take them very seriously.”

“You didn’t give her your heart, did you?” Pete quipped.

Jupiter gave his partner an irritated look.

“If you really have a little more respect for old age, you wouldn’t be talking like that now. Even if the lady seems cranky to you, I have to admit frankly that I like her. I can’t explain to you exactly why because I’m going by my feelings.”

“We should concentrate on the essentials,” Bob tried to appease them. In the meantime he had removed the kettle from the stove and poured the boiling water into the teapot. “Whoever’s abusing Miss Holligan has to be wanting to take advantage of the situation. Even if we consider the possibility that Metzla Holligan actually planned the recordings before her death, the question remains as to who set the game in motion after her death—why and for what?”

“What do you mean, for what?” Pete asked.

“Well,” Bob concluded. “After all, the attacks were done with a certain amount of effort. He or she would have to invest a lot of time to make the mysterious events happen in a certain order. Metzla Holligan could have offered someone a lot of money for this production after her death and probably paid a portion of it in advance. Would she still have much funds left given that she had already transferred the textile factory to Abigail Holligan? Also, would she be able to handle all this while being tied to her bed, terminally ill?”

“And in turn, Abigail Holligan bequeath her fortune to a foundation for cancer patients. So the money is already planned. But it is questionable whether the mysterious intruder is aware of this.” Pete sipped on his boiling hot tea and painfully distorted his mouth.

“Maybe he doesn’t know anything about it because he hasn’t had any personal contact with Miss Holligan yet,” Jupiter remarked.

“What are you saying again, Jupe?” Bob stirred nervously with a spoon in his cup.

“Doesn’t it make you wonder that the letter to Miss Holligan happened to be in the mailbox today, in which her son, who had been given away for adoption, came forward?”

“What is it?” Bob got all restless. “You mean he could be behind this?”

“He could be,” Jupe replied. “Maybe he found out that his biological mother is a rich woman, and he doesn’t want to wait for her natural death.”

“Isn’t that a bit far-fetched, Jupe?” Pete’s tea had now reached a pleasant temperature. He took a big sip.

“I stress, and this is pure speculation, that any clue can be important. I’m also interested in whether the father of this son is still alive and what Miss Holligan has to say about this whole thing. Only today it didn’t seem appropriate to ask her about it.”

“What do you think?” Pete asked, “Is that weirdo Richard behind it? I, for my part, would trust him to do a horror spectacle like this. After all, we’ve met a lot of bizarre guys during our career who weren’t even aware of the extent of their evil jokes.”

“In any case, we will put Richard and Miss Holligan’s mysterious son on the suspect list,” Jupiter said. “But first, one of us should do a little psychology course. Because we still

haven't solved our main puzzle."

Pete and Bob looked at the First Investigator in amazement.

"Could you be a little clearer, Jupe?" Bob hated it when Jupiter made hints and he had to pull the details out of his nose.

"I want to know from Dr Franklin why she prevented Miss Holligan to talk to others about the eerie voices. And I look forward to her response when we tell her that we also heard the voices."

"What's the point?" Bob asked. "Do you think the talk therapist might be behind this?"

"I don't really know at the moment." Jupiter reached for a thick hardcover book on the desk with the title 'Talk Therapy and Your Chances of Recovery' written in large gold letters on the cover. "I have read some chapters of this book and I must confess I'm not any smarter. Nowhere is a procedure used to describe a healing procedure in which the patient is encouraged to remain silent about his or her problems."

Bob took the thick psychology book and let the nearly thousand pages slide through his fingers. "Maybe this book isn't up to date and Dr Franklin is venturing into a new procedure with Miss Holligan. Maybe the talk therapist is using her a guinea pig."

"That would be possible," Pete threw in. "But I don't quite understand the point of obtaining information about a certain therapy method? I mean, if you don't suspect Dr Franklin, why go through all this trouble?"

"Because I'm interested in how a psychotherapist approaches a patient's problems," Jupe explained. "After all, she'll be doing something when she puts an invisible tape on Miss Holligan's mouth. This information may be useful for our future cases. Dr Franklin has an excellent reputation among experts for her therapies. And if we have the opportunity to expand our knowledge, we should take it. Maybe by understanding this, we might be able to help Miss Holligan better."

Pete, on the other hand, was not very optimistic. "But Dr Franklin won't tell us anything about her therapies for sure. Don't forget that there is this medical confidentiality thing."

"Then we'll just have to get more sophisticated." Bob was on fire. "I've always wanted to put my concerns to a psychotherapist. You can't go to the clinic again, Jupe. That would be too conspicuous. So I volunteer. I'm going to hit the couch at the psychotherapist's and see what she's got."

"Excellent, Bob!" Jupiter was visibly thrilled.

"Wait, wait, wait," Pete interrupted. "What about our plan to inform Chief Reynolds or Inspector Cotta? We did agree not to endanger the old lady's life unnecessarily."

"Truly spoken," Jupiter replied. "But I believe that the danger is not imminent. The abusive actions so far were still modest. Please don't get me wrong—if someone wanted to take the old lady out directly, this would have happened long ago. But as I said, in my opinion, the intruder would slowly approach Miss Holligan and instil fear into her. We do not need to fear any real threat for the time being. We will, however, need to be aware of the psychotherapeutic procedures and set a trap for the opponent. But first, Bob has to go undercover to investigate."

Bob took a deep breath. "A case for the couch. That's to my taste." Incidentally, something weighed on his mind, and he urgently wanted to talk about it with a psychotherapist in private. However, he wasn't feeling too optimistic about going undercover.

## 10. Bob Goes Undercover

Another storm raged over the city. Lightning flashed down from the sky and Bob saw the raindrops on the ninth floor running down the window in long wavy lines. He had an appointment with Dr Franklin and two days later sat opposite the psychotherapist in her consulting room on a comfortable leather armchair.

He had to secretly admit that he had imagined the therapist differently—at least as far as her appearance was concerned. She wore a tight black turtleneck sweater, white jeans and her blonde straight hair gave her a touch of youth, although she must have passed the age of fifty. Bob was pleasantly surprised and revised his prejudice. He might have sworn that the therapist received her patients in a white coat. But Dr Franklin emanated warmth that created trust. As she smiled gently at Bob, her well-groomed hands arranged some papers on the desk. Then she leaned back in her armchair and looked him straight in the face.

“It’s quite unusual for a young man your age to visit me.” Her voice sounded calm and relaxed. “Normally, people don’t dare come here until they’re well past twenty.”

Bob rubbed his hands in embarrassment. “That may be so.”

“I was told you were an urgent case. Anyway, you couldn’t wait till next week. Well, I have now slotted you in for this session and I hope to be able to help you with what is on your mind.” The therapist looked at him questioningly.

“Frankly, I’m not sure anyone can help me at all.” Bob was thinking about his main purpose there. But first and foremost he had a personal concern that he placed as a priority. He wanted to incorporate the information that was to be used in his investigation.

“There’s a solution for everything,” the therapist replied. “And your problem will seem less serious once we’ve talked about it.” Her left hand pointed to the windowsill with a coffee machine on it. “Can I get you something to drink?”

“No, thank you very much,” Bob replied. “It’s all right.”

The two then looked at each other in silence, while the slightly darkened room was illuminated in the meantime by lightning followed by rumbling thunder.

“What’s bothering you?” she asked.

Bob took a deep breath. He didn’t really know how to start. But then the words came slowly and embarrassingly out of him. “I have the best friend you could ask for,” he began. “I’ve been with Elizabeth for four years now and it’s no exaggeration to say we’re made for each other.”

“How do you express that?”

“We laugh together in the same places, have the same views on many things and appreciate each other—full of trust without compromise.” Bob looked at the therapist seriously. “You know better than I do that that doesn’t happen too often in relationships that last so long, and I should consider myself lucky.”

Now it was crashing so loud outside that Bob could feel the thunder in his belly.

“But it’s not like that now?” the therapist probed.

“You’ve got it.” Again they looked at each other for a moment in silence.

“What happened?”

Bob’s heart was beating faster now.



“Come on.” Dr Franklin remained calm and patient. “What’s the matter?”

“I... I have a crush on another girl.” Now it was out. But Bob didn’t feel liberated in any way. On the contrary. “But she doesn’t want me,” he added tonelessly.

The therapist pushed her armchair closer to the desk and supported her chin on her hand. “How may I understand that?”

“I’m afraid there’s nothing to understand. I was sure...” he stammered. “I was really sure that she was returning my feelings.”

Now the therapist became curious. “What made you say that?”

Bob was nervously twiddling his fingers. “From her shyness or embarrassment. And anyway... the way she looks at me.” Bob felt a slight sting in his heart area. “When our eyes meet, the ground beneath my feet falls away.” Bob had to admit that he was emotionally touched.

Dr Franklin seemed to feel this and tried to give her voice an objective tone. “Did you talk to her about it?”

“Several times,” he replied. “We’ve had dinner together.”

“And?”

Bob’s eyes stared into space. “It was cruel. She turned me down—just like that.”

A smile scurried over Dr Franklin’s face. “What do you mean by that?”

“That it couldn’t be more humiliating. I don’t know what you’ve had to put up with in your life, but it is hard to be told by a girl that you’re not her type and that you don’t have to hope for anything.”

“That doesn’t sound shy at all. Rather open and direct.”

“Not at all.”

Now the therapist looked irritated. “That’s interesting. Could you explain that to me in more detail?”

“I don’t believe her,” Bob replied curtly.

“And why not?”

Now Bob leaned back on the armchair and took a quick look out the window. The thunderstorm was still raging outside. “I can’t explain it but I could sense it, Dr Franklin. It’s simple. If I close my eyes now,” he tried to explain, “I will be able to tell you whether or not I like you or not. In your professional circle, I suppose this is called ‘sensitivity’, isn’t it?”

“That’s right.” The therapist nodded. “But you would not be the first to succumb to the illusion that her love will be returned. If you look back, then...”

“I don’t want to look back,” Bob quickly interrupted.

“I trust my perception, and it tells me that this girl likes me. Her name is Brenda, by the way. I just... I mean if I can’t trust my perception anymore, Dr Franklin... what’s left for me?”

Bob could not imagine that the therapist had an immediate answer at hand. But he was taught a better lesson.

“An introspection,” came over her shapely lips. “In other words, examine, observe, or ‘going in’ your own mental and emotional processes. And for that, one must look back. I believe that it is not Brenda that makes you unhappy, but another deep-rooted cause that is hidden in your early childhood. Brenda is at most the valve. But she has nothing to do with your grief.”

Bob sat there with his mouth open. Dr Franklin’s words upset him for a few seconds. “So you’re telling me what my heart’s feeling is wrong?” And he added, “Did they really teach you that?”

“Don’t twist my words around,” she replied. “Every man in his life has to struggle with heartbreak. That’s what it’s all about. You have to let the pain go, because that’s the only way you’re going to get over it. In my circle, this phase is called ‘mourning’.”

This word reminded Bob of a funeral, but he kept it to himself. “It would be nice if you were right,” he replied defiantly instead. “But I don’t think your diagnosis will help me. Because from my understanding, you are telling me that my instincts are wrong. And I ask you as an expert—how can you put the analysis of a single person in a nutshell, considering that people can have different behavioural patterns based on their feelings and reactions. I mean, maybe there’s something wrong with Brenda, too? Perhaps her rejection is also hidden in, say, a broken childhood.”

“That may be so. But this is about you first and foremost, not her.”

Bob, however, could not deviate from his feelings. “She has feelings for me.” He gave his voice a powerful undertone. “And I won’t deviate from that either.”

“A great self-confidence.” Dr Franklin looked at him seriously. “But if you continue to hold that view, you will continue to suffer. You know that.”

Well, he had to swallow for a moment. “I’ll take that.”

“If you’re really that unreasonable, I’m afraid I can’t help you.” The therapist rose from her armchair in a rapid movement.

Bob looked at her questioningly. “Is that your final word?” It began to get darker outside and Dr Franklin walked slowly to the window and looked at the heavy rain.

“Not quite.” She was silent for a few seconds, thinking. “There’s another way,” she continued, “to look at your feelings towards Brenda from a different perspective. We can try hypnosis. With hypnotherapy, I could find out where your pain is, your feelings and also where your lack of understanding for the girl come from. But the prerequisite for that would be that you don’t shut yourself off from me. Trust is the be-all and end-all of hypnotherapy.”

“I see.” Bob reminded himself inwardly to slowly direct the conversation to the question that should give The Three Investigators information about Miss Holligan.

But he didn’t have to try very hard. Dr Franklin summed up the subject without being asked. “Speaking of trust, did you actually tell your friend Elizabeth about your new love?”

Bob felt an oppressive feeling rising inside him. “She doesn’t know anything about this.”

“That’s what I thought. And what about your friends? Do you talk to them about your grief?”

“All other worries, yes. Not about love matters.”

Now the therapist came closer to Bob and put her hand on his shoulder. “This is a big mistake,” she said quietly. “I advise all my patients not shut themselves off from their fellow human beings with their problems. What’s on your mind has to be let out. You have to talk about it. Suppressing doesn’t help.”

Bob felt he just hit the jackpot, and emphatically he added: “Without exception?”

“Without exception,” she emphatically confirmed. “Well, what do you think of my proposal? Shall we try hypnosis?”

Bob feverishly considered how he could steer the subject inconspicuously to Miss Holligan. “Agreed,” he replied. “But I’d like to know more...”

Suddenly there was several knocks on the door before it was ripped open. Mrs Petersen entered and waved to Dr Franklin excitedly.

“Dr Franklin!” she cried. “An emergency in Room 7B!”

The therapist hurried to the door and shouted to Bob with short words: “I’ll be right back!”

The two women ran out of the room and left the investigator in his chair alone. Bob looked around the room with interest. And although his thoughts circled wildly around Dr Franklin's words, his gaze fell on a half-opened desk drawer.

Bob thought he should make an attempt to look for some clues. He turned back and saw that the door was half open. He got up from the chair and swung the door until it was only slightly open.

He then went over to the drawer and saw some folders in it. He took them out and found one with the label 'Patient / Franklin / Female'. Without thinking much about it, he opened the folder and found a computer-printed list of names that were alphabetically sorted—much like a directory—with some reference numbers. Very quickly he scanned down the list, looking specifically for one person, but nowhere, did the name of Abigail Holligan appear. Dr Franklin's patient records gave the impression that the old lady had never set foot in the therapist's clinic.

Confused, he quickly put the list inside the folder and then back into the drawer. He then turned to some of the shelves to take a look.

"And?"

Scared to death, Bob jumped. He turned around and looked towards the door. Dr Franklin stood there looking at him.

## 11. Calm Before the Storm

“How... what...?” stammered Bob. “What do you mean?” At that moment, he wasn’t sure whether Dr Franklin had caught him putting the file back into the drawer.

“Hypnotherapy. Have you made up your mind?” She was still standing at the doorway.

For a moment Bob’s breathing stopped. He then realized that he was standing quite close to the patient’s chair so apparently Dr Franklin had not suspected anything. Still, he had to pull himself together.

She then came closer. “I’m sorry, but we’re going to have to stop now. If you are interested in hypnosis, please make an appointment at the counter. It is best in the afternoon the day after tomorrow. I’m afraid I have to see another patient now.”

“I, uh, okay.”

He wanted to leave this room as quickly as possible and hastily walked towards the door. But when he was just outside the room, Dr Franklin laid her hand on his shoulder and held him back.

“Oh, Bob?”

Bob could not tell from the tone of her voice whether she had seen through him or not. He paused anxiously.

“Yes?”

“Suppose Brenda learned to appreciate you and wanted to be with you... what about Elizabeth?”

Bob didn’t move and tried to avoid the therapist’s questioning gaze. “I... uh... why...?”

Dr Franklin did not turn her intense gaze away from him. “Didn’t you think you were going to have a happy relationship earlier? Full of trust and without compromise?”

Bob knew what the therapist was getting at and felt something very close to a guilty conscience. She took her hand off his shoulder and stepped out. “I’d think about that if I were you. So...” Dr Franklin turned on her heel. “See you in two days’ time.”

Bob stood there and watched the therapist until she had disappeared behind a door marked ‘7B’. He then had Mrs Petersen give him an appointment for hypnosis and then rushed out of the clinic as quickly as possible.

Back at Headquarters, Bob had briefly told Jupiter and Pete about his conversation with the psychotherapist and, as expected, they considered his love affliction to be a clever move that had sprung exclusively from his imagination. Later, he had sworn to himself that he wanted to tell them the truth. But now the first thing that had to be clarified was why Dr Franklin’s advice to the old lady was so blatantly contradictory to what Bob learned.

The Three Investigators had maintained telephone contact with Miss Holligan for the past two days and were reassured to learn that the intruder had taken a break. Anyway, nothing unusual had happened to the old lady in the last forty-eight hours.

“And what should we do now?” Pete asked. “Since we started the investigation, we’ve been going round in circles. At first we wondered about Miss Holligan’s remarks. Then Dr Franklin’s therapy method seemed questionable to us. And now, again, I have the impression that Miss Holligan is withholding some information from us.”

“What are you saying, Pete?” Jupiter asked.

“Counter question,” Pete countered. “If Dr Franklin confirms that she did not recommend her patients to lock up, then why would she advise Miss Holligan the opposite? She could have told Bob that there were special cases where it would be better to remain silent. But she didn’t. Consequently, one of the two ladies is not telling the truth.”

“Very well said,” Jupiter praised. “And so we’re going to take another look at Mrs Holligan—and right away. We should also look at another key issue.”

“And what’s that?” Bob asked.

“Abigail Holligan’s will. If we really want to solve the case, the old lady will have no choice but to let us look at it.”

“What for?” Pete didn’t have a clue.

“Quite simple,” Jupiter explained. “The woman is wealthy. Somebody is speculating on her fortune. I’m absolutely certain of it. And we need to get an overview of how this is regulated by the cancer foundation. Maybe there’s a legal loophole that the intruder wants to exploit.”

“Miss Holligan’s son, who suddenly reappeared, may be behind this.” Bob was feverishly thinking. “For example, would he be entitled to the inheritance? Or part of it?”

“An interesting thought. But before we continue to speculate, I suggest we go and see Miss Holligan. I’m going to call her now and ask if we can stop by right now.”

“Go ahead.” Bob handed Jupiter the phone. “I hope she’s home, too.”

“We’ll know in a minute.” Jupiter switched on the loudspeaker, dialled and heard the ringtone. It cracked on the line. Then The Three Investigators heard a heavy breathing sound before Miss Holligan screamed hysterically into the phone. “Get out of my life! Do you hear me? I told you to get out of here!” She sobbed and seemed to be losing strength.

Jupiter reacted immediately. “Miss Holligan!” he shouted. “It’s us, The Three Investigators! Was that your sister’s voice again? Has anyone called you again?”

Miss Holligan answered something. However, they could not understand anything as her words were drowned in tears and sobs. It sounded so desperate that Pete’s neck hairs stood up.

But Jupiter called Miss Holligan to her senses. “Pull yourself together, Miss Holligan! Please! We’ll be right there with you. Just tell us—what happened?”

The old lady was still breathing heavily. But then she caught herself and stammered: “The... the phone rang... and this time... this time... I heard her voice before I even picked up the phone!”

## 12. The Patron

The Three Investigators examined the telephone and the side table on which the machine was placed. But nowhere was there a hidden loudspeaker or any other installation that would have explained how Metzla Holligan's voice could get into her sister's living room. The old lady sank down on the couch and grabbed her chest with a pain-distorted face. She looked so upset. Pete had meanwhile prepared tea in the kitchen and handed Miss Holligan a cup, while Jupiter sat cross-legged on the sofa and began his questions.

"We have three suspects, ma'am, and I would almost certainly claim that one of them would turn out to be the culprit if you could give us the information we need," Jupiter said.

"Three suspects?" the old lady repeated in disbelief. "Who are you talking about?"

"Person number one would be your long-time friend Richard, whom you bought this house from."

Miss Holligan stood up excitedly and grabbed her grey dishevelled hair. "Find another scapegoat!" With this one sentence she brushed off the blanket from her knees and slipped into a pair of slippers. "Richard's character remains untouched! He'd be the last person to harm me like that. I'm not sure what you mean by friendship, but when I refer to someone as a friend, you can safely remove them from your list of suspects. And that's that!"

The Three Investigators looked at each other in alarm. The impulsive rebellion of the old lady had come so unexpectedly that Pete even feared that the next moment, they would be thrown out of the door again. But just as quickly as Miss Holligan had lost her composure, she calmed down again.

"What motive should he have?" she asked and put the cup on her lips.

"Frankly, the motive is still a mystery to us," Jupiter continued steadfastly. "Because it can only be seen from one thing—which brings me to the real question."

"I'm curious about that." Miss Holligan put down her cup and put her glasses on. She was unspeakably nervous, stood up and walked restlessly up and down the living room. "Well, I'm listening."

The First Investigator came straight to the point. "We'd like to take a look at your will, and how it is stated that your entire fortune would be bequeathed to the cancer foundation."

"What for?"

"Because I suspect that there is something wrong." Jupiter looked the old lady straight in the eye. "I've been pondering for days about what the intruder is trying to achieve with the harassments. The conclusion we have reached might sound quite unpleasant."

Miss Holligan was silent and showed no outward emotion.

"You are no longer young, ma'am, and you have a weak heart." Jupiter swallowed. "We all wish you a long life. But I believe the intruder is trying to put a quick end to this. Someone has targeted your legacy and therefore staged the attacks using your late sister. Everything was prepared down to the smallest detail. The one behind it had to be one hundred per cent sure of him or herself."

"One hundred percent sure they could collect the fortune when the time comes," Bob joined in.

"It's simply impossible!" Miss Holligan was gasping for breath. "The company, this property and all my savings are earmarked exclusively for the foundation. I have that clearly in black and white!"

"That's what it's all about, ma'am." Jupiter persisted. "We'd like to read this clauses."

"All right, then." The old lady agreed. "But not until you've given me the name of the other two suspects. But don't say another word about Richard. I'll put my hand in the fire for him!"

"And what about your son?" Pete asked suddenly.

A twitch went through Miss Holligan's face. Then there was silence for a few seconds. Only the ticking of the old wall clock could be heard.

Miss Holligan shuffled to the table, sat down on her chair and poured some tea into the cup. "That wasn't fair, young man," she said quietly. "And extremely tactless. Times were different then compared to now."

The Three Investigators were embarrassed to have raised this private matter. But they had to carry out investigations into all possible suspects.

"An illegitimate child was considered a great shame then," the old lady explained.

"Especially since the father had run away just before he was born. I was nineteen years old and was terribly naïve. I actually imagined that the man wanted to marry me and start a family with me. But the dream burst like a soap bubble and my parents insisted on giving my child up for adoption. Well... they finally got their way. The whole thing is now 54 years ago and since then no day has passed in my life in which I have not regretted this act, I swear."

"And you haven't heard from your son since?" Bob asked.

"No, not until that letter arrived that day."

"Nevertheless, it is and remains strange that after 54 years, exactly at the time of these terrifying attacks, you got a contact from him." Jupiter looked at her. "Doesn't that make you wonder?"

"A coincidence," said Miss Holligan. "I don't see any direct connection here. You better tell me who's third on your list."

"Dr Franklin," Jupiter remarked dryly, immediately earning indignation.

"I really can't take you seriously anymore." The old lady shook her head without understanding. "When I hear you say this, I can only apologize by saying that you are quite young and inexperienced. You really suspect Dr Franklin? This is ridiculous!"

"And why?" Bob adjusted his glasses.

"Because the lady is interested in far more important things than money. That's why!"

"What makes you think that?" Jupiter asked.

"A human being who is committed to other people free of charge, who teaches them that psychological well-being is far more important than all the treasures of this world, cannot be interested in bringing me into the ground early."

"Free of charge? How did it come to that?" Pete asked.

"When Metzla learned of her incurable illness and knew that she did not have much longer to live, she went mad. Living with her became a torture for me. But then, by chance, I came across an article in the *Los Angeles Times* about talk therapy, in which Dr Clarissa Franklin received great praises. I visited her in her clinic with a firm determination and described my worries to her. "I was nerve-racked back then, reaching for every straw, so to speak."

"And then what?" Jupiter asked.

"Dr Franklin took care of my sister."

Like Aunt Mathilda before her, Miss Holligan also became enthusiastic about the psychotherapist's abilities.

"She took care of Metzla in a self-sacrificing way and even managed to alleviate the terrible fears my sister had of death by talking to her. She was also very anxious to smooth the waves between the two of us. Even shortly before Metzla's death, Dr Franklin did not let herself miss the opportunity to personally offer comfort at her bed. Without fee—and that was for weeks."

Jupiter first had to process this new information. He was obsessed with chewing on his lower lip. Something was wrong, his instinct told him, while he listened to Miss Holligan's further words with interest.

"You're on the wrong track with your suspicions. I'll even put that in writing. Besides, you don't want to question my knowledge on human nature, do you? None of the three persons mentioned is a possible perpetrator to me.

"And least of all is Dr Franklin. Or do you think I would even leave a dollar to the patron of the cancer foundation if I had the slightest doubt about her loyalty?"

Jupiter almost choked on his tea. "What was that? Did I just get that right? Your entire fortune goes to Dr Franklin?"

"Not to her," Miss Holligan corrected Juve. "But to her cancer foundation, which she will start. And that reassures me immensely that the money would be well used for charitable work."

"And that's all documented in your will?" Jupiter was stunned, but kept it to himself.

"You have an even a worse memory than I do. I told you that a few days ago."

"Who drew up the will?" Pete asked cautiously.

It turned out that the old lady, despite her old age, had an excellent memory. "A renowned and successful notary. His name is Jack Cliffwater, and his office is in Santa Barbara—not far from here. But the will won't tell you much. And there's not going to be a catch either. The notary is much too serious for that."

"And how did you get to know him?" Pete was sometimes just as adept at questioning as Jupiter.

"I met him by chance a year ago at the annual party of my textile company. He's a great soul. I didn't even have to go to his office to draw up my will. He visited me here and completed all the formalities in this house."

"Would you show us the will for a moment?" Bob discreetly reminded Miss Holligan of her promise.

"All right, then. For once. I hope it doesn't bring bad luck..." With shuffling steps the old lady went to an antique mahogany desk and opened the lowest drawer. "But it's only a copy. The original is, as I said, deposited with the notary."

Initially, her hands were still calm as she looked through the papers while she mumbled to herself something unintelligible. But suddenly her fingers became hectic and began to search feverishly. Jupiter, Pete and Bob watched the old lady, whose face was slowly turning pale.

Then she turned around and looked at The Three Investigators, stunned.

"Don't think I'm insane now, but the copy of the will is not here!"



### 13. Two in the Same Boat

Miss Holligan turned the whole desk upside down. But she cannot find the document, and she got really upset.

“What is there to be upset about?” Pete finally asked. “The original is deposited with the notary. He can photocopy the note and...”

“The document,” the old lady corrected Pete.

“Good, the document then.” Pete wasn’t petty. “Anyway, you can call your notary and ask him to make another copy and send it to you. Then we can take a quick look at it.”

“And you say nothing about the theft?” Miss Holligan looked blankly at them. “Shouldn’t I call the police?”

“I would prefer to wait a little longer,” Jupiter suggested. “Maybe the intruder will watch your house and would be cautious if the police arrive. And that’s exactly what we should avoid right now.”

“Could you explain yourself a little more, Juve?” Pete already suspected that Jupiter had come up with a concrete plan.

“We must to get the intruder to come out. That’s why we should be careful about this.” Now the First Investigator turned to Miss Holligan again. “Please wait two more days before informing Mr Cliffwater about the theft of the copy. Please don’t tell anyone else about this either.”

“I’ve heard that sentence before from Dr Franklin.”

“Please don’t tell her anything either,” Juve added. “And the most important thing of all, no one should know that you hired us as detectives. Can you handle this for the next forty-eight hours, ma’am?”

“Of course,” Miss Holligan replied, dryly adding, “I’m not stupid after all.”

“We will now go back to our headquarters and discuss the next steps,” Jupiter replied, more to himself. “If anything unforeseen should happen, please do not hesitate to call us immediately.”

“Got it. You can rest assured. I’m hanging in there. But what are you going to do?”

“Be patient for two days and then you’ll know everything.” Jupiter winked at Miss Holligan conspiratorially and walked towards the front door with Pete and Bob. Halfway there, he turned around. “Oh, Miss Holligan?”

“Yes?”

“Do you know why Dr Franklin advised you to keep these incidents to yourself?”

“Because of my heart. It’s very weak. She said that if I were to talk to other people about Metzla, there would be a danger that I could get very upset emotionally, and I should not take the risk.”

Jupiter was not sure whether that explanation was justified or not. Nevertheless, he took note of it, but saved himself a comment.

“Bob, switch on the computer, check the business directory and find out where Jack Cliffwater has his firm!”

The Three Investigators entered Headquarters and Bob immediately sat down at the computer to follow Jupiter's instructions. He retrieved the software containing the entire business directory of California. The First Investigator drummed nervously with his fingers on the desktop while the computer was loading the software.

"Am I right in assuming that we can add a fourth suspect to our list, Juve?" Pete stared curiously at the monitor, on which the directory finally appeared.

"You got it, Pete." Jupiter pulled up a chair, let his full body flop on it and took over the mouse, with which he now quickly clicked to the letter 'C'. "The disappearance of the will, the contents of which are known only to Miss Holligan and this lawyer Cliffwater, makes me wonder..."

"I don't see any connection," Bob intervened. "I mean, what could he do with the copy when the original is safely kept in his office? In general, what motive should the notary have for entering Miss Holligan's apartment and stealing the copy? And most importantly, what makes you think he's involved in this?"

"Think about it, fellows." In the meantime, Jupiter had come across Jack Cliffwater's address and found that his place of residence and his law firm were the same. He tagged the information, turned on the printer and looked at his friends. "Miss Holligan told us earlier that the notary came to her house to draw up the will with her. She also mentioned that she had no friends and very rarely received visitors, right?" Jupiter paused theatrically. "What does that tell us?"

"Not much to me at least," Pete had to confess frankly.

"Of course!" Bob's eyes began to glow. "With the meticulous order that Miss Holligan keeps her house, the old lady would have noticed immediately if an intruder had searched for the copy of the will in her absence. Unless..."

"Unless," Jupiter added, "the intruder knew where to look. And this somebody could only be the notary who—after having authenticated and sealed the will, probably had a tea or something served to him by Miss Holligan—was able to observe exactly where she kept the document."

"Or he hired an accomplice," Bob thought.

"That may be so." The First Investigator moved the mouse on the pad back and forth and clicked the letter 'F'. "In any case, we can assume with certainty that the terrifying attacks and the theft of the will are on the same account. Although it is not impossible for an outsider to have a key made, it does involve a great deal of effort. I just wonder when he had the opportunity to steal Miss Holligan's key unnoticed and..." Jupiter broke off and became pale in his face as his heart began to beat with excitement.

"What's the matter, Juve?" Pete asked. "Why don't you keep talking?"

Jupiter couldn't believe his eyes, and stared at the screen with his mouth opened. Out of pure curiosity, he had called up the records of 'Dr Clarissa Franklin', who, in addition to her practice details, he found her home address. "Fellows, do you see what I see?"

"Well, well..." Pete said, shocked. "Miss Holligan's closest soul mate lives under the same roof as our number four suspect, Jack Cliffwater—at No. 1, Blomingdale Road. I don't want to be indiscreet, but I think it could be more precise—Jack Cliffwater and Clarissa Franklin are in the same boat!"

"You got it, Pete." Jupiter tagged the record and had it printed out as well. When he held the two printouts in his hand after a few seconds, he handed one of them to Bob and purposefully grabbed the phone. "Now I'm curious to see who's answering the phone at No. 1 Blomingdale Road."

He switched on the loudspeaker and dialled the number which was identical for both persons. At first there was a ringtone. Then there was a crackling sound and the answering machine started. A monotonous male voice sounded: "This is Cliffwater's automatic answering machine," it came out dull from the loudspeaker. "I'm out at the moment and won't be back until Friday night. Please leave me a message after the beep or just try again later." Even before the beep sounded, Jupiter hung up.

"What are we going to do now," Bob asked, with queasy feelings of his conversation with Dr Franklin. "Do you really think they're behind these acts?"

"We'll see the day after tomorrow. At the latest then we will have certainty," Jupiter said with conviction.

"The day after tomorrow?" Bob asked. "Why the day after tomorrow?"

"In case you've forgotten, you have a hypnosis session with your psychotherapist in two days, whom you would distract with your problems for at least an hour."

Bob was puzzled. "Distract? But from what?"

"Bob, wake up! Your hypnosis is the day after tomorrow!" Even Pete had a hunch of what the First Investigator was going for. "While you're lying on Dr Franklin's couch, Jupe and I, equipped with lock picks, will make our way to Blomingdale Road. We can't wait for a better moment. The lawyer Cliffwater returns on Friday evening and his room mate is hypnotizing a lovesick young man." Pete couldn't help grinning. "And if we don't find the will there, we might find some other incriminating material, or at least some indication that our clean couple is trying to send Miss Holligan on a horror trip."

"I'm in!" Bob got up from his chair, turned off the computer and looked at Jupe and Pete triumphantly. "I will stand up to the trained psychotherapist. I'm as smart as she is. You just take a good look around Blomingdale Road, I'll fool the hypnosis specialist by every trick in the book of The Three Investigators!"

Bob even thought about getting some more information out of the future patron of the cancer foundation. In his head he already had a plan in mind, but he didn't realize that his knowledge and understanding of hypnosis was not much.

## 14. Deep Hypnosis

The plan that The Three Investigators had drawn up seemed promising. Bob was confident and had already made his way to the clinic that Friday at 2:15 pm, while Jupiter and Pete routinely gathered their tools at Headquarters. As a precaution, the First Investigator had called the law firm again and was reassured to find the same answering machine text from the day before yesterday was still the same.

The two were about to leave Headquarters when the phone rang. Although the two boys were in a hurry and didn't want to waste any time, Jupiter picked up the phone.

"Jupiter..." stammered the voice on the other end of the line.

"Miss Holligan," Jupiter said. "What's the matter? We're on the move right now and..."

"I blame myself so terribly, you have to believe me," she interrupted him. "But Dr Franklin insisted on absolute trust, and that's when I broke my promise."

"What are you talking about?" Jupiter turned on the loudspeaker and saw Pete's worried face at the same time.

"I was at a therapy session this morning with Dr Franklin and I told her about you..."

"What do you mean 'told her about us'?" The First Investigator sensed trouble.

"Well..." The old lady obviously found it difficult to find the right words. "We talked about my depressions and my loneliness and that I was tired of isolating myself from people. And that's where I let it slipped out just like that."

Jupiter became impatient. "What slipped out of your mouth?"

"That I hired you as detectives! I showed Dr Franklin your business card. I told her that you explained that you don't think I'm crazy and that you finally want to put an end to this creepy thing with Metzla! I'm so proud of you..."

Jupiter stopped breathing. He didn't know at that moment how to react to Miss Holligan's confession.

"I know we agreed to keep the matter between us," she continued unflinchingly. "But as a professional, Dr Franklin is bound by secrecy and I thought to myself..."

"You shouldn't have done that," Jupiter reacted a little harshly. "But what's done is done. We can only hope that we don't have problems now."

"Problems? But what problems?"

"Bob is on his way to see Dr Franklin right now as part of our investigations. He may be in big trouble. It remains to be seen whether the therapist is sharp enough to figure out what Bob intends to do."

"But what does Dr Franklin has to do with your investigation?" the old lady shouted into the receiver.

"We can't give you any information about that right now. Please don't do anything more and stay in the house," he urged her. "This is the best thing for everyone now. Could you promise us that?"

Miss Holligan was silent for a moment. "All right," she finally said. "I won't do anything to interfere with your investigations. Do you really think your friend could get in trouble?"

"All we can do now is wait," Jupiter replied and tried to end the conversation after looking worriedly at the clock. "Keep your nerve, and please wait for our call. As soon as we

have learned something decisive, we will inform you about it. Please don't be angry with me, but I have to hang up now!"

Miss Holligan stammered something unintelligible, but then she finally agreed and said goodbye. With a serious expression Jupiter put the phone down.

"That's all we needed," Pete remarked as he put the lock picks into his pocket. "An idiosyncratic client who doesn't abide by our agreement. What do we do now? It's imperative that Bob be warned. If Dr Franklin knows that he's there to distract her, it could be dangerous for him! His appointment is at 3:00 pm."

"We are faced with the worst of the situation," Jupiter tried to console Pete, but he had the same fear.

"It is 2:20 now," Pete stammered. "What do you suggest we do?"

Jupe thought a while and said: "We could send Bob a warning, but that could be very risky because we don't know who's in charge at the clinic."

"I believe if Dr Franklin found out who Bob is, he could be in big trouble," Pete added, "so I think we should at least attempt to warn him. Then we decide whether we should proceed as planned."

"Agreed," Jupe said. "Okay, here's what we'll do. You have to call the clinic because the receptionist might recognize my voice. Bob might be there at the waiting room now. Ask for him and say that you need to speak to him about something urgent."

Pete switched on the loudspeaker and reached for the phone to proceed as Jupe suggested. As expected, Mrs Petersen answered, and Pete asked for Bob.

After a short pause, Mrs Petersen replied: "I'm sorry, Dr Franklin has had an earlier appointment rescheduled and Mr Andrews is now with her. I cannot disrupt the session now. Perhaps you could leave me your details and I'll pass the message to Mr Andrews when he comes out."

Pete replied that he will call back later and hung up. "Bob could be in big trouble now." Pete was trembling with fear.

"Our hands are tied now," Jupe said. "We have no choice but to stick to our plan and trust Bob to distract the psychotherapist up to 4:00 pm. By then, hopefully we would have found the will and figured out how these two are involved in this sordid affair."

Pete agreed and, after another look at the clock, realized that they needed to hurry. It was already 2:30 pm and a half-hour drive into the Blomingdale Road was extremely tight.

"I will now attach the electrodes to your head." Dr Franklin had led Bob into a room, above the door of which there was an illuminated sign with the words 'Sector 7 Blue'. In it was a couch and a strange apparatus, which the therapist now cabled up with some plugs.

Bob was already lying on the leather-covered couch. The clock on the wall now showed 2:30 pm. Earlier, when he was called at the waiting room, he could not think of a reason to avoid having his session being brought forward. Now he knew that he had to prolong the session until at least 4:00 pm, so he decided to ask questions.

Bob looked at the therapist, worried. "That doesn't hurt, does it?"

"You won't feel a thing," she said calmly.

Dr Franklin reached for a container of a strange-smelling paste, scooped some out and gently rubbed it onto Bob's scalp. Then she pressed the ends of the cables lightly onto it.

"What's that paste?"

"It's a conductive paste. It is used to hold the electrodes in place."

She then attached the other ends of the cables to an electronic device. “The electrodes are only for recording your brain waves,” she explained.

“For what purpose?”

“For the electroencephalogram—that’s the device here...” Dr Franklin explained, pointing to the device. “It monitors your brain during hypnosis. During microsleep, your physical reactions change. The blood pressure drops and the metabolism slows down. But what’s most amazing is that the energies of the brain waves switch from the left to the right hemisphere.” She pointed to two glowing indicators on the device.

Normally, Bob would have an interest in such things, but at that moment, he wasn’t really paying attention to Dr Franklin’s lecture. He was thinking of more questions to ask in order to delay the session.

“And what does that mean?” Bob asked.

“During our waking state, now, our left brain is working. It’s also called the left hemisphere. It determines our rational, analytical thinking. In other words, our logic.”

“And the right brain?”

“The right half is responsible for our subconscious, our feelings and emotions,” Dr Franklin rattled on. “Switching from the rational to the emotional side causes the left hemisphere of the brain to run low. And that means I can get closer to your subconscious. This computer here converts the brain waves into a graph so that we can then see exactly what happens in your brain during hypnosis.”

Bob had a queasy feeling and looked at the therapist sceptically. “And you think it’ll work?”

Dr Franklin smiled. “You’re not the first patient on this couch.” Now her gaze got piercing, which Bob associated with the mesmerizing snake, Kaa, from ‘The Jungle Book’. “The question is, though, can you let yourself go. But we won’t know until later.”

Bob thought he was safe and thought it would be revealing to find out if the psychotherapist was actually able to reach to his subconscious and thus gain access to his innermost feelings. The main thing, however, was to keep Dr Franklin busy with him so that Jupiter and Pete can proceed with their investigations.

Dr Franklin rose from her stool. “Are you ready? Do you feel relaxed?”

Bob took a quick glance at the clock. It showed 2:50 pm. He nodded. “I suppose we can get started.”

“Good. I’ll dim the light then.” With her feet she operated a switch on the floor and slowly the small room darkened. The therapist reached for the remote control and activated the recording of the electroencephalogram. Then she sat down on the stool again and began hypnosis with calm, relaxing words.

“Close your eyes... Your body becomes light... You feel an inner warmth that takes hold of you and carries you far, far away... Your breath becomes calmer... and you become tired... unspeakably tired...”

Bob felt himself getting tired.

“Your innermost feelings are loosening and wanting to come out of you.” The therapist’s voice became more and more evocative. “You feel a deep longing... a longing for security, tenderness and closeness...”

Now, Bob felt drowsy. “Yes...” he mumbled and felt a pleasant feeling in his head.

“Brenda appears before your mind’s eye... She smiles at you and slowly embraces you in her soft, warm arms...”

“Brenda...” Bob mumbled.

Dr Franklin took a look at the brainwave display on the device. It indicated to her that the left side of his brain had already calmed down and hypnosis was in progress.

"But there are also your friends... Jupiter and Pete," she continued in the same calm tone. "You're trying to help an old lady... a sick old lady who hears voices..."

"Yes..." Bob blinked and saw a blurry Dr Franklin, whose corner of her mouth played around a devilish grin, while her gaze was fixed on the computer graphics.

"You're trying to figure out where those voices come from... You've already started the investigation, right?"

Bob was no longer the master of his senses. "We must help her... I must distract her..." he mumbled.

"Who do you have to distract...?" Dr Franklin's words sounded calmer than ever. "Who do you have to distract...?" she repeated insistently.

"Dr Franklin... She can't know... anything about it... the will..."

"We breathe calmly and relaxed... we feel comfortable..." Dr Franklin continued.

"Yes..." Bob mumbled again.

"Your friends..." Bob felt Dr Franklin's hand gently caressing his arm. "Where are they now?"

"The will..." he murmured. "We must find the will... Blomingdale Road... Must distract her... the patron... I'm tired..."

The therapist stroked on and on with her trained hand. "Easy... easy... you need to sleep... sleep deeply and comfortably..."

A quick glance at the display board signalled to her that Bob was already in the deep sleep phase. So she ended her strokes and instead reached into her wide skirt pocket from which she pulled out a mobile phone and walked to a far corner of the room. Now her fingers began to tremble nervously as she pressed the small buttons on the mobile phone and waited eagerly for the call to be connected. Finally, the other end answered.

"Yes?"

"Jack! We have a huge problem!" The therapist whispered, despite her inner excitement, so that Bob would not wake up prematurely from the hypnosis.

"What happened?" the voice asked coldly and matter-of-factly.

"I can't explain to you in detail. Where are you now?"

"Still in L.A., but I want to go back right away," Jack replied. "What's the matter with you? You sound so nervous!"

Dr Franklin was breathless but sounded very urgent. "Listen to me carefully. Three boys have come to track us. They have made contact with Holligan. Two of them are in our house right now looking for the will!"

"What are you talking about? Where's the third one?"

The therapist took a quick look at the computer display. "Lying in front of me on the couch. I just got the info out of him."

"Is he asleep?"

"Yeah. What are we going to do now?"

Now Jack's tone changed. Like Dr Franklin before him, Jack spoke in a relaxed and evocative manner to the therapist. "Easy. Take it easy. I'll go home and clear this up."

"I'm coming with you!" Dr Franklin said.

"All right. When can you be there?"

"Thirty minutes. But what am I doing with this boy in the meantime?"

"Give him a shot of something to keep him sleeping! We'll deal with him later. So, see you soon and keep your nerves. I'll wait for you in the car a short distance from the house."

Park beside me so as not to alert them we're back!"

A twitch drove through Dr Franklin's face. "Jack?"

"What else is there?"

"I love you," she whispered, barely audibly, then her finger pressed a button and the call ended. She slipped the phone back into her skirt pocket.

Bob was still breathing calmly and relaxed. Dr Franklin quietly opened a drawer of a small cabinet and took out an ampoule, the contents of which she pulled into a glass syringe. Without disinfecting his skin beforehand, she pricked the long needle into Bob's arm and injected the anaesthetic drug directly into his bloodstream.



## 15. In Search of the Will

All the windows of the house on Blomington Road were covered with curtains from the inside. When Jupiter and Pete arrived there, no one was seen along the street, and Pete parked on a side road a short distance away.

Nevertheless, they were careful and approached inconspicuously through the small front garden towards the front door. They discovered a small metal plate next to the bell, on which the names 'Cliffwater & Franklin' were engraved.

Jupiter, as a precaution, pressed the bell and waited. Everything in the house was quiet. Nothing moved. A home alarm system was not visible.

Pete took action and pulled the lock pick out of his pocket. He stuck it in the keyhole, turned the tool around for a few seconds and grinned mischievously as the door opened with a soft squeak. "Please come in, sir," he joked and let the door shut again when they were inside.

Down from the hallway were several doors. Each of them stood open and gave a view into the respective rooms. Jupiter went ahead briskly and inspected the premises. There was nothing unusual in the kitchen. Dirty dishes piled up in the sink and almost threatened to tip over.

The First Investigator entered the adjoining room with Pete and made a surprise whistle. They were in the notary's office. Cleanly labelled and alphabetically sorted was an enormous collection of files stretched across several shelves. Jupiter walked purposefully towards a shelf. At one end, a small cardboard sign with the letter 'H' was attached with adhesive tape. Jupiter pulled out the folder marked 'Holligan'.

"So far so good," he remarked quietly and put the folder on the luxurious desk. He opened it, flipped through a few pages and finally tapped the document he was looking for with one finger. "Here it is!" Jupiter took out the document which was enclosed in a plastic cover.

Then his gaze fell into the corner of the office and his eyes lit up. "Pete, start the photocopier over there! We get ourselves a duplicate of the will and then put the original back into the folder. Cliffwater and his lovely Clarissa won't even notice that we've been snooping around his office!"

"Won't you at least read the will?"

"Sure," Jupiter replied. "The photocopier needs time to warm up anyway."

Pete turned the device on. Then he went over to Jupiter at the desk.

"These criminals..." Jupiter murmured as he scanned the document. "Here, Pete, listen to this:

*"I, Abigail Holligan, in full possession of my spiritual powers, have experienced all ups and downs in life. I felt sadness and happiness, pain and health and now I feel that the time is approaching to think about saying goodbye.*

*I have never cared much about my wealth and I despise those who consider material goods more important than spiritual treasures.*

*'Love, friendship and affection were my first priorities in life. But to my regret I had to realize that these values mean nothing to most people.*

*'I believe in life after death and I am sure that our short life here on earth is a test. We must learn to appreciate and respect each other without thinking about our own benefits. Material thinking is primitive thinking. This experience has accompanied me for over seventy years.*

*'Money and possessions don't make you happy unless you're willing to share. I've learned that there are worlds apart between saying and doing. Therefore, I bequeath my entire fortune, currently \$20 million, to my closest confidant, Dr Clarissa Franklin, born April 24, 1946 in Boston. She has taught me that charity is the highest imperative on earth and has brought me to the path of wisdom. She's planning to set up a foundation for cancer patients. I wish the patron all the love imaginable and hope that she will make many more people happy with her self-sacrificing help.*

*'With the greatest respect...'*

"... and this was signed by Miss Holligan. So I was right about my suspicions. Dr Franklin will be twenty million dollars richer after Miss Holligan's death." Jupiter pinched his lower lip. "What could be more obvious than to end her life prematurely?"

"But we have no proof, Jupe." Pete wasn't very confident. "Sure, the will was worded so our therapist gets the money—even without first establishing the cancer foundation—if that's what she's planning."

"I doubt it." Jupiter handed the will to Pete for photocopying. "I'll go look in the other rooms." And he went out into the hallway.

Pete proceeded to photocopy the document, then took the original back to the desk and put it on top of the folder.

Jupiter was now in the adjoining room. Here, too, there was a desk full to the brim with books with titles ranged from 'Modern psychology' to 'The Power of the Subconscious'. It was clear that Dr Franklin used this small room as a study.

Spontaneously Jupiter opened one of the small brass-studded drawers and immediately scanned through the contents. He reached in and pulled out a small dictation machine. Two audio cassettes tied with a rubber band were also there. The name on the sticker was 'Metzla'. "Well, well, well, look at that!" Jupe exclaimed.

With a copy of the will in his hands, Pete joined in and looked over Jupe's shoulder with interest. "What have you got there?"

Instead of an answer the First Investigator put the cassette into the device and pressed the start button. At first there was only a hissing noise. Then the two heard the moaning and coughing of an old woman—Metzla Holligan! And there was also a second voice, that of a younger woman—Dr Clarissa Franklin!

The two detectives had goose bumps running down their backs. They stood in front of the dictation machine with their eyes wide open in horror and barely dared to breathe. Although the recording quality left something to be desired, one could still clearly understand every word. "I don't want any more..." Metzla Holligan said in agony. "Thanks to her, I'm lying here now. She's provoked me all my life. And now that I'm dying, my sister is playing the Samaritan... Abigail... I hate you and I will not rest until you have received your last rites, you old bitch..."

"We heard the sentence on the phone," Pete shouted so suddenly that Jupiter startled.

"Quiet now," he admonished him, for the voice of Dr Franklin came next.

“Your sister is always jealous of you,” said the psychotherapist with an intriguing undertone. “If I were you, I’d give a lot of thought to bequeathing her even a cent.”

Metzla Holligan’s scornful laughter turned into a suffocated cough. “No, no... that’s fine... The company will drive her to ruins... It serves her right, that bitch!”

Jupiter had heard enough and switched off the device. It took a few seconds for Pete to regain his composure.

“Jupe, if I understood correctly, Dr Franklin helped turn Metzla Holligan against her own sister! Or am I wrong?”

“It would be nice if you were wrong, but here we have the evidence of one of the most evil crimes in our hands. Dr Clarissa Franklin herself encouraged Metzla Holligan on her deathbed to hate tirades, so that she could play to our old lady a large selection of the most provocative utterances on the telephone!”

“Not just on the phone,” Pete added. “Even in the toilet of the clinic. Probably Dr Franklin secretly installed a loudspeaker there so that her other colleagues would believe that the old lady was really crazy.”

“We’re going back to Headquarters.” Jupiter took the dictation machine with the cassettes and inserted the incriminating material in the pocket of his jacket. They left Dr Franklin’s study as they had entered it.

The First Investigator rushed to the notary’s desk and took the original of Miss Holligan’s will, inserted it back into the folder and put it back on the shelf. Then he folded the photocopied document and handed it to Pete. “Here, you take this. I have the cassettes. I think we have enough evidence.”

Both of them rushed out of the notary’s office into the hallway heading towards the front door. “We’re going to meet Bob at Headquarters and then we inform Chief Reynolds. I swear to you, this evening...” Jupiter paused suddenly and at that moment he felt that his heart had stopped.

He heard a click from the door!

## 16. The Hour of Truth

The First Investigator reacted in a flash. Instantly he gave Pete a signal, went back into the notary's office and quietly opened the window. Then they both scurried into the next room, and at that very moment, they heard the front door open. The only hiding place in the room was behind the psychotherapist's desk. It was pretty tight, but Jupiter and Pete managed to squeeze together and put their ears on alert.

The footsteps they heard going into the next room were strongly muffled by the carpet. Then, for a moment, there was complete silence. Suddenly, they heard Dr Franklin's voice. "We're too late! They've gone out through the window!"

"Damn!" another voice exclaimed. Jupiter immediately recognized the voice from the notary's answering machine. It was clear to him that Dr Franklin was in the next room with Jack Cliffwater.

"Where's the will?" The therapist's question sounded like an order.

Jupe and Pete heard a file being pulled off the shelf, followed by rustling paper.

"Strange!" the notary exclaimed. "It's still here. Perhaps they did not manage to find this."

"Hold on here..." Dr Franklin said, then she paused for a moment. "Why is the photocopier switched on?"

Pete forgot to switch off the photocopier! Beads of sweat ran down from Jupe's forehead, and Pete felt his body begin to tremble uncontrollably in fear.

"Damn!" the notary said for a second time. "They've got a photocopy of it!"

"Oh, gosh!" Dr Franklin shouted suddenly. "I've got a terrible suspicion! The recordings!"

"Where did you hide it?" the notary asked immediately.

"In my room. At the desk..."

Pete felt the heat rising in him and his fear seemed to transfer directly to Jupiter. The First Investigator, who was otherwise more rational, was terrified and his clear thinking was switched off. Motionless, he continued to huddle behind the desk with the Second Investigator.

A few seconds later, he found himself looking at Dr Franklin in the face like an animal driven into a corner as she entered her room and discovered the two in their poor hiding place.

Smoothly and without a trace of surprise, she took a step back and called out to her accomplice.

Jupiter noticed a slight twitch around the corners of the notary's mouth when his broad stature appeared at the doorway and stood just behind the therapist.

"Well, well, well. So the mice are trapped. You were trying to trick us, weren't you?" Cliffwater's eyes fixed on Jupiter for a moment. That moment was enough for the First Investigator to regain his composure.

Groaning, he crawled out from behind the desk and courageously built himself up in front of the notary. "Wait a minute, mister. I know you."

Cliffwater remained motionless at the doorway. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

Jupiter was not sure whether the notary's ignorance was merely tactical or truthful. "You ran into me at the elevator the other day—at the practice of the well-known shrink, Dr Franklin. And this was exactly the day Metzla's voice recordings were played in the toilet at the clinic. And that was done by you!" The notary still showed no emotion.

Now Pete had come out from behind the desk, but stayed cautiously behind the First Investigator.

"I'm not sure yet how you could install a loudspeaker in the toilet undetected," Jupiter continued unflinchingly, "but I suspect that you installed your device in the ventilation shaft and thus echoed Metzla's hate tirades off the walls of the ladies' toilet.

The therapist kept an eye on Jupiter suspiciously, and she sharply asked: "Give me the will. And fast!"

Jupiter turned to her. "I'm not thinking about it." He grinned provocatively.

Dr Franklin unexpectedly stepped up to Jupiter and swung her hand in an attempt to slap him. Juve was quick and raised his arm to block her swing. However, the force was great when her arm hit Juve's and he staggered back. Pete held on to Juve and pulled him back a step. Even Jack Cliffwater seemed surprised at his girlfriend's action. He stepped forward and gently held back his accomplice. "Calm down. I'm sure there's another way."

Then he turned to Jupiter. "Give me the will!"

"I didn't want to believe it." Jupiter rubbed his sore arm and looked at Dr Franklin. "As a psychotherapist, you were Miss Holligan's only confidant. Why did you have to do this to her? You would have inherited everything anyway."

"In ten years?" Dr Franklin didn't show any emotion. "Or twenty years from now?"

Now Pete had to let out his anger. "So that's it. Pure greed." He resolutely faced the therapist. "How deep must one actually sink to and commit such a heinous crime to abuse an old woman like Metzla Holligan who was dying? You allegedly cared for her with your personal commitment. Well, congratulations—all of this was very well schemed and calculated. Now you are doing it to Abigail Holligan. You really are the worst piece of trash we've ever met."

The therapist looked at Pete with hatred. "Don't open your mouth so wide, or I'll shove a fist in your face and suffocate you. Now give me the will!"

With horror, Jupiter saw how Dr Franklin reached into her skirt pocket. She took out a set of brass knuckles and glided her fingers into the holes.

Now, Jupiter found it difficult to remain calm. "First of all, I'd like to know how you made Metzla's voice react after Abigail Holligan cut her finger with a potato knife? I mean, you couldn't possibly have foreseen that." Jupiter had struck just the right note. The therapist's inner tension gave way and with an almost exaggerated calm she settled on her desk chair while Mr Cliffwater continued to block the escape route.

"Of course, we couldn't plan the little accident with the potato knife in advance. I had already recorded Metzla's utterances weeks ago. The voice recording was fixed and it so happened that the old woman had a knife in her hand."

"Oh, so now I understand!" Jupiter slapped his hand on his forehead. "It was pure coincidence that Miss Holligan cut her finger at the right moment. You couldn't have planned for the recording to fit so perfectly."

Jupiter hadn't let the brass knuckles out of his sight for a second. Now the therapist's fingers slipped out of the weapon, took a box out of her pocket and pulled out a cigarette. She calmly reached for a lighter, lit the glow stick, inhaled herself with the smoke and blew the haze into the air.

“That was a sign, wherever it came from. It was a sign to push the game forward. And I have to admit, the effect was amazing. She trembled when she came to my clinic the next day. She couldn’t explain this phenomenon to herself.” Dr Franklin laughed gloatingly at the thought of it.

“And the mysterious intruder into Miss Holligan’s house was you, Mr Cliffwater, right?” Carefully Pete took a step back and leaned against the desk. “You opened the window, smashed the pane from the outside so that the pieces of glass flew in, and closed the window. Then you fled by the food elevator to the kitchen, from where you got to the front door unseen.”

Mr Cliffwater still didn’t move an inch. “So you got it all figured out. Well done!”

“And how did you manage to get into Miss Holligan’s house unnoticed?” Jupiter continued unabated. He did not really know what to do except to buy more time.

But Dr Franklin didn’t let it get to another discussion. She squeezed out the half-smoked cigarette and shoved her hand back into the brass knuckles. “Now the talk show is over. I’ll count to three and if you don’t give me the will, I’ll get it myself.”

Jupiter felt her tension. He was not sure how long the therapist would be able to control herself, but the First Investigator did not admit defeat so quickly. “We will make our statements to the police and the inheritance is gone. You’re finished. Completely. Both of you will never be allowed to practise in your profession again and you can expect a hefty prison sentence. Besides, the press will rip you apart.”

“And rightly so!” Pete now joined Jupiter.

“So, do you think so?” A superior smile scurried over Dr Franklin’s face. “Then take the advice of a successful psychotherapist.”

Jupiter looked at the therapist provocatively. “And what would that be?”

“To err is human.”

“What do you mean?” Pete asked suddenly.

“Jack, shoot them!” Pete couldn’t believe his ears, but when he looked over to the notary, he realized very quickly that he hadn’t misunderstood the instruction. Calmly, Mr Cliffwater reached into the inside pocket of his jacket, pulled out a revolver and pointed at Juve.

Pete’s mouth got dry and he had to swallow hard. “You’re... you’re insane.”

“That would be so if we let you go.” Dr Franklin went to the window and closed the curtains. “I’m sorry. But your lives aren’t worth \$20 million to me!”

Never before had Jupiter felt so helpless. The situation seemed hopeless. Suddenly a thought flashed through his head. What happened to Bob? Had he figured out what the psychotherapist was up to? Wildly, Jupiter’s thoughts spun through his head, while Cliffwater’s revolver was aimed directly in his direction. He had to buy more time to find a way to get out of this predicament alive. But he couldn’t think of anything clever.

“What... what have you done with Bob?” he stammered. But Dr Franklin’s facial expression was unmistakably clear that the two detectives could not count on their friend.

“Sir, listen... be reasonable!” Jupiter pleaded to the notary.

Cliffwater remained unimpressed. “Shut up!” he said while he looked over to the therapist and expected further orders from her.

“Listen to them whining for mercy.” Dr Franklin gave a short nod to her boyfriend. “Go ahead. Shoot them!”

Jupiter and Pete trembled uncontrollably all over their bodies. Then there was a gunshot. Jupiter cried out and Pete saw his friend collapse and lay motionless on the ground!

## 17. The Gift of Life

“No!” Pete screamed as he knelt down. He clearly saw a hole left by the bullet on Jupe’s jacket. “What have you done?”

Jack Cliffwater lowered his weapon and looked blankly into space. Pete looked imploringly at the couple. Dr Franklin could not resist his gaze and looked away. For some time, there was dead silence in the darkened room. Pete felt like it was forever.

Suddenly, a bursting sound startled all those present, followed by heavy footsteps coming into the house. Dr Franklin turned around to face the door, as Cliffwater was knocked to the ground by two police officers charging into the room, with revolvers in their hands. “Now, nobody move!” When he fell, Cliffwater’s weapon was released from his grip and one police officer snatched it from the floor. The other grabbed the brass knuckles from the therapist. Then, a third police officer came in. It was Inspector Cotta.

Pete was the first to react. “We need an ambulance! He shot Jupe!”

Before the inspector could answer, Miss Holligan and Bob entered the room and made their way forward. Both stared with their mouths open at Jupiter, who was still lying motionless on the floor.

“How... how’s Jupe?” Bob stammered with extreme fear on his face and rushed to the First Investigator. Everyone was stunned and there was a momentary silence.

Then... “Excellent, fellows! I am unharmed!” Jupiter staggered to rise up, groaning and visibly enjoyed the confusion of the people present.

Pete’s face literally collapsed. “But, Jupe...” he stammered, “How... how could this be?”

The First Investigator reached into the inside pocket of his jacket and triumphantly pulled out the dictation machine. “I guess this thing’s gone, Dr Franklin. The bullet’s probably still in there because I didn’t get a scratch.”

Jupiter then struggled up and handed the surprised inspector the destroyed recording device, where clearly visible on one side was a bullet hole.

On Inspector Cotta’s order, with a click, handcuffs closed around Dr Franklin and Mr Cliffwater’s wrists. He then looked at Jupiter. “You’ll have to explain this to me in greater detail later. It seems to me that you three have stumbled onto something nasty again.”

Pete went up to Inspector Cotta and took a close look at the destroyed dictation machine. “All due respect,” he commented with a relieved grin. “This makes an excellent bullet-proof vest!”

Jupiter, still feeling groggy from the impact of the shot, reached into his jacket pocket and took out the two cassettes and gave them to the inspector. “On these cassettes you can hear the irrefutable evidence that Dr Franklin and Mr Cliffwater tried to drive Miss Holligan to premature death with the voice of her late sister. The two knew that the old lady had a serious heart condition and hoped that their actions would bring them the inheritance sooner. They would have collected the inheritance anyway if they just had a little patience.”

Miss Holligan was visibly shocked. With tears in her eyes, she turned to Jupiter. “You were right,” she stammered. “You were right about your suspicions from the beginning. And I was so foolish to believe that my son... my lost son could be behind all this abuse.”

The First Investigator looked over to the therapist. "On this matter, Dr Franklin, the letter from Miss Holligan's son, you wrote it, right?"

Dr Franklin kept silent and looked blankly on the floor.

Abigail Holligan struggled for breath. "No, no... I don't think so." In the depths of her heart, however, she felt that Jupiter was right with his supposition. "But why?"

"I can think of two reasons," Jupiter explained. "The first is to plant a suspect for us to focused on. The second is to bring someone back from your past so that it would stir you up emotionally."

"That sounds insanely convincing." The Second Investigator wiped the beads of sweat off his forehead. He then looked at the therapist. "Dr Franklin, you have plenty of time in prison to grieve," Pete said. "To put it in a way that should be familiar to you, you can then really 'go inside' yourself."

Miss Holligan stood there rooted to the ground. A heavy burden seemed to have fallen from her soul.

"Okay, that's enough," Inspector Cotta interrupted and gave the police officer a signal. "Take these two away." The two officers took Dr Franklin and Mr Cliffwater into their midst and proceeded to lead them out of the room.

Miss Holligan didn't make a sound. Stunned and with her mouth opened, she looked at the two criminals. When Dr Franklin was walking past in front of her, Miss Holligan stopped the police officer who was escorting her. With a swift action, she reached out her right hand and slapped the psychotherapist with all her might, and shouted in her face: "You devil! I trusted you!" Dr Franklin remained silent as the police officer continued to lead her out of the room.

Just outside the doorway, the psychotherapist suddenly stopped and turned her head in Bob's direction.

"Oh, Bob?"

"Yes?"

"Good luck."

"Thank you," he replied tonelessly and looked irritably at her.



## 18. All's Well That Ends Well

It was the next day. Earlier in the morning, The Three Investigators had been asked by Inspector Cotta to go to the Rocky Beach Police Department to clear up some questions on the case. Chief Reynolds was also present.

Now they were at Miss Holligan's house. The old lady had welcomed the three detectives at the front door and led them into the living room. The sun shone brightly through the windows, which Miss Holligan had cleaned earlier in the morning.

Jupiter, Pete and Bob saw the full extent of Miss Holligan's renewed energy and momentum. The carpets were vacuumed, the dust wiped and all the vases had the most colourful flowers that nature had brought forth that spring.

They sat at a table in the garden, with the old lady expectantly and curiously looking at the three boys.

Jupiter took the lead in the conversation. "I must confess I have suspected Dr Franklin for a long time. The full extent of her insidious and unscrupulous plan only became apparent to me this morning at the police station."

"The police were not very clear on the couple's intentions at first." Jupiter made an important face. "But finally, Chief Reynolds was able to persuade them to make a comprehensive confession."

Miss Holligan leaned back relaxed in her armchair. "I'd appreciate it if you could explain the story from the beginning. It seemed to me today that, even at my age, I could still gain a few more experiences."

"All of us do, ma'am," Pete threw in and for the first time, he felt comfortable in her house.

"When Dr Franklin took care of your sick sister months ago, she had already achieved many remarkable successes as a psychotherapist. She would certainly have earned more acclaims with your sister's therapy. However, Metzla's hatred towards you inspired her to come up with a diabolical idea.

"The matter began when Metzla learned of her incurable illness and she then took advantage of Dr Franklin's therapy. From Metzla and you, Miss Holligan, the therapist learned of the feud that existed between you two, and the fortune that you would leave behind one day. When she further learned that both of you had not yet appointed heirs, she sensed a chance to make a lot of money."

"That's true," confirmed Miss Holligan. "I must even admit that I was already thinking of bequeathing my entire fortune to her at that time, because I was really convinced of her selflessness. As a psychotherapist, she must have sensed that very clearly."

"Yes, she did," Jupiter continued. "And so she informed you of her plans to start a cancer foundation, and conveniently pointed out, by the way, that she lacked the necessary funds. So you decided to transfer the entire fortune to Dr Franklin."

The old lady nodded.

"The psychotherapist then learned from you that you would be at your textile company's party. So she sent her boyfriend, Jack Cliffwater, to this event, with the aim of staging a chance acquaintance with you, in order to entice you to draw up a will. The notary was able

to do this easily. The will was written in such a way that Dr Franklin would receive the total assets of twenty million dollars in any case, even if she had not yet established a cancer foundation. Up to this point, this cleverly crafted will was at best reprehensible, but not punishable.”

“I guess that was a mistake,” said Miss Holligan with a tone of self-reproach. “But it was done at the time when I had absolute confidence in Dr Franklin.”

“Very understandable, ma’am.” Jupiter gave the old lady an encouraging look. “The weaker Metzla became, the greater her hatred for you became. The thought that you, Miss Holligan, could continue to enjoy life after her death made her hatred rise to immeasurable proportions. The tirades of hatred that she revealed to Dr Franklin eventually gave the psychotherapist the idea of secretly recording them. She even used hypnosis to provoke Metzla into uttering more curses.”

Bob suddenly flinched, recalling himself sitting in the therapy room undergoing hypnosis.

“But why?” Miss Holligan asked as she glanced across the three of them.

“Dr Franklin’s boyfriend was broke, simple as that.” Pete took his turn to explain. “This occurs even with the most prestigious professions. She wondered how she could get to the inheritance as quickly as possible to help Mr Cliffwater out of a mess. She knew that you had a severe heart condition, Miss Holligan, and then she had the diabolical idea of resurrecting Metzla with her voice after her death in order to shock you into a cardiac arrest.”

“I trusted the two of them! I really did—with all those ethics that they were supposed to adhere to, but I guess I was wrong,” Miss Holligan exclaimed in horror and blinked at Pete through her thick glasses. “No person could seriously consider such terrible intentions!”

“Unfortunately, some do,” Jupiter replied. “When you accidentally cut your finger with a knife, it was just a coincidence that Dr Franklin had the right set of Metzla’s voice recordings. She hit the jackpot so to speak, but that really threw us off in the investigations. Dr Franklin, however, was then in top form. During a hypnosis session, she stole your house key from your pocket and got a duplicate made.”

“But even then, how did they get past my home alarm system?”

“When you were hypnotized, Miss Holligan, she just simply asked you for the security code,” Juve explained.

The old lady was so amazed that she couldn’t close her mouth again.

“And from then on the two of them had unimpeded access to your house—here. They staged further events that were intended to give the impression that Metzla was still haunting you as a vengeful spirit. Mr Cliffwater installed a loudspeaker under your telephone table, creating the illusion that your sister’s voice was coming out of the phone before you even picked it up.”

“But you’ve thoroughly examined the telephone table!” Miss Holligan gave Jupiter a questioning look.

“Yes, but before that, Mr Cliffwater had removed the loudspeaker. He was in your house when we called. And when he heard you asking us for help, he quickly removed the speaker and took the will away. He knew exactly what drawer you had put it in.”

“Why did he take the will anyway?”

“... simply to prevent us from seeing it,” Juve explained. “He wanted to prevent us, or anybody for that matter, from suspecting their intentions.”

“Money corrupts character. Twenty million dollars was too large a sum to have anybody foiling their scheme. Both of them wanted the money, even though the notary’s debts amounted to only a few hundred thousand dollars. Had they received the inheritance, we are

not even sure whether the cancer foundation would materialize. They could just create another situation to swindle the funds for themselves.”

Then it was Bob’s turn. “If you hadn’t come into the clinic yesterday, Miss Holligan, and hadn’t persuaded Dr Miller to open the therapy room, and if I hadn’t awakened from the anaesthetic in time, the whole case could have ended very badly.”

The old lady smiled mischievously. “When Jupiter told me on the phone the suspicion that you, Bob, might be in danger, I immediately threw on my coat and went to the clinic. I was glad I reached on time.”

The three detectives smiled.

“That actually clears everything up,” Jupiter remarked, staring with ravenous appetite at the delicious food that the old lady had uncovered to celebrate the day.

“Indeed,” Miss Holligan replied. “And now I finally want to take this opportunity to thank you all with all my heart for your help. In retrospect, I’m really glad you didn’t let me get rid of you. The ‘salami tactic’ thing was really stupid of me. At least I shouldn’t have associated it with you. You guys are great! Rely only on your feelings in the future, and you will see that you are right!”

With this last sentence, the old lady looked over at Bob. And, as if she had guessed his feelings, she winked at him optimistically.